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When Empires Collapse...

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DECEMBER 1989 VOL. LXXIII No. 5 ISSN 0013-7073

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© 1989 by Encounter Ltd. Ten issues a year (January-February and July-August are single issues). Per copy: UK £2.00: USA $4.50: Canada $5.00. Back numbers £3.00 ($6.00). Postage/packaging: 75p ($2.00). Annual subscription rates: see page 78. Address for all departments: Encounter Ltd., 44 Great Windmill Street, London W1V 7PA (01-434 3063): UK Trade Distributors: Cutlerglen, 13 Newington Industrial Estate, Crampton Street, London SE17 3AZ (01-708 1308). Second-class postage paid at Rahway, NJ. US Postmaster: send address corrections to Encounter, c/o Mercury Airfreight International Ltd Inc., 2323 Randolph Avenue, Avenel, NJ 07001.

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**Colonel Eugueni Smirnov, former deputy air attache at the Soviet Embassy in London was so keen that he called personally to collect our publications. Sadly, he will have to wait a little longer to read them. He was one of 11 spies sent home by the British Government in May 1989.*

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Hugh Trevor-Roper & George Urban

Aftermaths of Empire

The Lessons of Upheavals & Destabilisation

If Hitler Had Won . . .

GEORGE URBAN: *These are intriguing times for the student of modern dictatorships. For the first time in history, a totalitarian party and state have shown themselves, without defeat in war, to be bankrupt in fact if not in rhetoric. "The dictatorship of the proletariat" is moribund, not only by the standards of its Western critics, but by those, too, by which it has itself chosen to be judged. The immensity of this fact has yet to be fully understood by our public opinion. How did it all come about, seeing that the system has always claimed to have privileged access to "the logic of History" and indeed to be its foremost representative? Was the "logic" a mere mirage, or were its vicars in the Kremlin in profound error?*

But the questions raised at the Soviet end of the Soviet-Russian enigma are not the only ones that puzzle an historian—those at the Russian end of it are just as disturbing. We have scant experience of Russia without an autocracy or a world-mission . . . and the Soviet empire is in the process of losing both. Should we hasten the disintegration because it works for freedom . . . or slow it because it works for instability?

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER: No revolutionary ideology preserves its full content for long. The essential unit in historical change is "the generation"; and the generation that has been through an ideological battle or crusade, building an empire on a revolutionary basis, has a different attitude towards the world from that of the next generation, which takes it for granted. Historically, all revolutions lose their ideological content in measurable time—sometimes quite soon, sometimes in one generation, sometimes in two. It doesn't, therefore, surprise me that the Russian Revolution should have lost its ideological content now that we are out of the generation which participated in it.

You ask what will happen when an empire based on an ideological revolution loses its ideological content. It becomes mechanical, is my answer; or it ritualises its ideology, or it adjusts it, because ideologies are very elastic and they can be adapted to all kinds of circumstances. We have seen this in every such empire. If Hitler had won his war, the next generation would have gone through a similar experience. Hitler claimed that the system he had established would last for 1,000 years, but who believes that? A completely different generation would not have had the will, or the energy, or the finance to maintain the empire of brutal conquest which he had planned and begun to set up.

So the evaporation of Soviet ideological commitment does not surprise me. The difficulty is forecasting what form the revolutionary ideology will take in the next generation.

—The history of Christianity suggests a parallel. The founders of the faith are followed by schoolmen, administrators and interpreters. They lose touch with the basic inspiration and concern themselves with institutionalisation and discipline. Is it not remarkable, though, that despite institutionalisation, and many vicissitudes, Christianity has kept its basic message and its basic appeal virtually intact? Mightn't the ideological appeal of Communism, too, survive the exit of the Soviet system?

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER—*who sits in the House of Lords as Lord Dacre of Glanton—was Regius Professor of Modern History, Oxford (1957-80), and Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge (1980-87). His publications include "The Last Days of Hitler" (1947), "Hitler's Table Talk" (ed., 1953), "The Rise of Christian Europe" (1963), "Hitler's War Directives" (ed., 1964), "The Age of Expansion" (1968), "The European Witch-Craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries" (1970), "The Goebbels Diaries" (ed., 1978), and "Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans" (1987). His most recent article for* ENCOUNTER *was "Hitler Revisited" in the December 1988 issue.*

GEORGE URBAN*'s contributions to* ENCOUNTER *include conversations with Milovan Djilas (September/October and November 1988), Vladimir Bukovsky (November 1987, January 1988), Alain Besançon (May and June 1987), Galina Vishnevskaya (December 1986, January 1987), Max M. Kampelman (February 1985), Alexander Zinoviev (April 1984), Jeane Kirkpatrick (November 1983), Eugene V. Rostow (April 1983), and Daniel Bell (February 1983). "Can the Soviet System Survive Reform?", a collection of these conversations, was published in May 1989 by Pinter Publishers in London and New York.*

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TREVOR-ROPER: It might: when I said that ideologies are elastic, that is what I meant. They can adjust themselves, they can acquire a new or modified content. The revised ideology can spring from a hitherto neglected or "misinterpreted" source within the movement. Within Communism we have Euro-Communism, which is different from Marxism-Leninism; and it's not impossible that Marxism—which has already produced a variety of heresies—should produce more, and that one of these heresies will replace the original faith and will be institutionalised. That's exactly what has happened in Christianity: what were once heresies became the source, within the old Christian envelope, of a new dynamism. It happens again and again.

—It has been said that Marxism itself is a Christian heresy: "Christianity gone awry", as one historian put it.

TREVOR-ROPER: A Christian heresy or a Jewish heresy—Christianity itself being, of course, a Jewish heresy. If Hitler had won his War (and one has to remember that he very nearly did—there were occasions when it was really a fluke that he didn't), Marxism would have collapsed and its political base in Stalinist Russia would have disappeared. An established Nazism could then have bred its own National-Socialist heresies. A Nazi empire in the heartland of Europe, including the Ukraine and Russia, would eventually have assumed features of a functioning, bureaucratic state which most people would have accepted because it was a reality. But I'm saying all this to point to a mere possibility. I am chary of prophesying because not a single ideology in history has ever been predicted.

—You said National Socialism would have spawned its own heresy. Can you imagine an enlightened, rational, post-Hitlerian Nazi leader, a kind of "National Socialist" Gorbachov, saying this sort of thing after Germany had won the War and Hitler was dead?

> **"We're sorry about the Jews and the concentration camps. . . . These things were a gross abuse of National Socialism. . . . Adolf Hitler and his anti-Party clique alone were responsible. . . . But here now is our own interpretation of the true meaning of National Socialism, a Nazism 'with a human face', a Euro-Nazism. . . . We are going to 'restructure' our relations with the nations who have come under our rule in the *Reich*, rehabilitate the victims of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, abolish the *Reich* Ministry of Propaganda, reduce our armed forces, and have peace with our neighbours. . . ."**

Would Margaret Thatcher or Ronald Reagan have run happy summit meetings with such a National-Socialist leader in the way they have done with Gorbachov? Would President Mitterrand have befriended such a second-generation Nazi?

TREVOR-ROPER: Yes, I can conceive the possibility. There was a side of Nazism which carried an appeal outside Germany, especially as long as Germany seemed to be winning. It helped to create the international divisions of the *Waffen-SS*. There were several of these: the Grenadier division "Charlemagne", composed of Frenchmen; the Grenadier division "Landstorm" of Dutch volunteers; the 1st and 2nd Grenadier divisions of Russians (later made part of General Vlasov's army); two Latvian Grenadier divisions; an Estonian Grenadier division; the Grenadier division "Langemark" of Flemish Belgian volunteers; the Grenadier division "Wallonie" of Belgian Walloon volunteers, and so on.

These people believed in Nazism, and I have no doubt that if Hitler had won, the brutal face of Hitlerism would afterwards have been exchanged for Nazism with a more human face. German Nazism would have been "de-Hitlerised" rather as Soviet Communism has been "de-Stalinised"; and the crimes of the revolutionary first stage of National Socialism would have been deplored and explained in much the same way as Stalin's great purges are now deplored and explained in the Soviet Union.

After all, why did Nazism succeed? In one respect it succeeded because the old German historical philosophy—the philosophy of "the German mission"—was grafted on to it. It was men like the Secretary-of-State Ernst von Weizsäcker, father of the present President of the Federal Republic, who provided the sort of explanation that would have been used by sophisticated Euro-Nazis in a post-Hitlerian Nazi empire.

Ernst von Weizsäcker was an old imperialist who disliked Nazism but served it because his eyes were fixed on the German mission and because he did not attach too much importance to the means that were to be used to attain it. Weizsäcker senior served the Nazis, in my opinion, in a pretty disreputable way. . . .

—Which Franz Schönhuber, current leader of the Right-wing Republicans, is now mischievously exploiting to attack the Bundespräsident *Richard von Weizsäcker himself, as well as the entire West German Establishment. . . .*

TREVOR-ROPER: Naturally, I deplore Schönhuber's smear-tactics—guilt-by-association is an old Stalinist/Nazi method. However this may be, Weizsäcker senior was responsible for the diplomatic arrangements with Hitler's so-called allies—Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia—for the transfer of their Jews to the extermination camps. We have this amply documented. Weizsäcker signed the correspondence. He knew perfectly well what euphemisms like "transfer to the East" and "resettlement in the East" really meant, and what the Nazi *apparat* was doing. There was one occasion when Ulrich von Hassell, who was a real resister in the Foreign Ministry and who thought he was on good terms with Weizsäcker (they spoke "the same language"), was summoned by Weizsäcker and chided for his insufficient appreciation of the historical achievements of Nazism. Weizsäcker said: "Great historical changes cannot be carried out without a certain amount of crime. . . ." In other words, the crime was purely incidental; you disown the crime and welcome the great historical changes which were inseparable from it.

If Hitler had won, the Weizsäcker-class would have said just that. It would have felt guilty about the unfortunate crimes which had accompanied Nazism, but it would have claimed: "Nazism nevertheless presented us with an empire which the Kaiser had vainly sought in 1914-18. Now we have succeeded, and succeeded through the genius of one man.

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We dissociate ourselves from Hitler's crimes but we recognise that they were historically inseparable from Germany's rise to greatness."

Yes, I can see that as a realistic development if Hitler had won the War.

—The sort of thing that is now being said about Stalin by many people in the Soviet Union. . . . But do you think our own politicians might have extended the same friendly welcome to a "de-Hitlerising", "restructuring" Nazi leader as they are now extending to the de-Stalinising Gorbachov?

TREVOR-ROPER: I would rather not mention particular politicians, because it is unfair to give hypothetical answers about what they would have done. But I can see that there would have been politicians who would have extended such a welcome. After all, they could have argued as follows: "We are only continuing the policy of the appeasers of the 1930s, who were honourable men, and whom the events have proved right. They didn't like Nazism any more than we do, but they recognised that it was there, and that they had to deal with it. 'We can't remake the world to our own specification', they said. 'We've got to face the world as it is. Hitler is supported by the entire German people; we must negotiate with him'. . . ." The same reasoning would have applied even more forcefully if we had suffered defeat and faced a de-Hitlerising Nazi leader.

Just before the War there was a book written by Sir Arthur Bryant—a respectable, patriotic, historical writer—called *Unfinished Victory* (published, rather interestingly, in 1940). It was pro-Hitler and in favour of appeasement. It wasn't merely in favour of yielding to superior force; Arthur Bryant felt that Germany had been wronged and humiliated by the Versailles Treaty, especially by the French, and that the rise of a strong man was inevitable. He believed that Hitler offered Germany a version of Socialism without the Marxist gloss. He invited us to respect "the rude Cromwellian vigour" of Hitler's speeches and the single-minded dedication of the Nazi state, even though he looked upon Hitler as a megalomaniac and despot.

—Before we go on from the German theme, the late Sidney Hook, the distinguished American philosopher, recently said to me:

> **"Looking back at what resulted, I say to myself on occasions: what would have happened if there had been a negotiated peace [in World War I]? I remember Lord Lansdowne's proposal to negotiate peace with Germany and that it was repudiated. What would have happened even if there had been a victory by Wilhelm and the Germans? What probably would have happened couldn't have been worse than what actually did happen. There would not have been Lenin; there would not have been Mussolini and there would not have been Hitler. The irony of it! It makes one a little humble about predicting the course of history. . . ."**

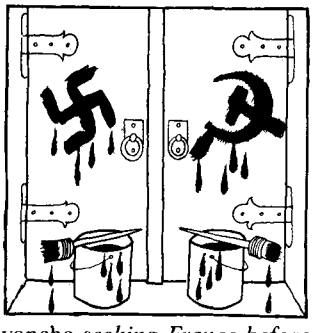
Would you agree with Sidney Hook, on the basis of what you have just told me, that in one generation a victorious Wilhelmian Germany would have lost its triumphalism and roughness (assuming that it was going to be rough and triumphalist in the first place) exactly as Hitlerism would have lost its revolutionary savagery, and Soviet Communism is in the process of losing it now? I would have thought a victorious Wilhelmian Germany would have been an incomparably lighter burden for the rest of Europe to bear, and much more open to self-reform, than either Bolshevism or Nazism.

TREVOR-ROPER: I have heard Hook's argument before—but never from an historian. It is, I believe, a false argument. The short answer I would give would be to refer to Fritz Fischer's great work *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (1961), in which he extracts from beneath layers of falsification and whitewash the consistent war-aims of the Kaiser's government in World War I. They were, *mutatis mutandis*, very similar to those of Hitler, although they did not have the same racialist inspiration. Fischer argues that had they been achieved they would have sown a harvest of hatred which would have led to enormous convulsions within a generation.

In fact Germany was defeated and produced Nazism. But suppose we and the French had suffered defeat? That would have prevented the rise of German Nazism. But then what about the defeated countries, France and England? The French in particular had very reactionary Right-wing forces which would have reacted to defeat in French-Nazi fashion. We would have come face-to-face with Nazism whatever happened, most probably in France, and elsewhere too.

It is too easy to imagine that if the Kaiser had won, history would have stopped—that all the European monarchs would have kept their thrones, that the aristocracies and hierarchies would have been preserved in aspic, and the rise of parvenu dictators would have been put off indefinitely. It is easy to imagine this, but it is nonsense. History moves on. If Wilhelmian Germany had won the war, the European society that existed before 1914 would not have survived intact any more than it survived Imperial Germany's defeat. It was the War, not the Allied victory, which caused the social upheavals that followed.

2. *Slaves & Masters*



THE NAZIFICATION of a defeated Western Europe is an intriguing idea. Do you really mean "Nazism", or would it perhaps be more accurate to say that a defeated France and Britain would have become irredentist powers of the authoritarian kind we know from earlier examples? Revanche-*seeking France before 1914 was certainly not a monument to human reason or wisdom. But can we compare it with Nazism?*

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TREVOR-ROPER: A form of Nazism *could* have arisen in Western Europe. The Germans, after a victorious war, would have imposed crippling reparations on France and Britain. We had a foretaste of that in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the indemnities the French were made to pay. It has been argued that the Versailles Treaty and the naval blockade which went on for some time after the Armistice were in large part responsible for the economic, social, and indeed physical devastation of Germany and the subsequent rise of Hitler. There is some truth in that. But it is frequently forgotten that in Germany World War I was financed in the expectation of gigantic indemnities. There was practically no war tax. The war was run on loans which were going to be repaid out of reparations exacted from France, Britain, and Russia, as they had been exacted from France in 1870.

But, of course, 1870 was a successful *Blitzkrieg*. It was over in no time at all, which provided a fatal example for generations of German politicians to come. They were all misled into believing that the next war would be similar. But it was not. World War I went on for four bitter years. The loss of life and treasure was incalculable. So, if Germany had won, a defeated France and Britain would have been made to pay huge indemnities; and the imposition of such indemnities would, in my opinion, have produced in France and England social consequences such as led, in Germany, to Nazism.

Let it not be forgotten that, despite the brutal language Clemenceau employed at the peace negotiations in Paris, Germany was treated rather leniently in terms of territory. Its losses were relatively small. Except for Alsace-Lorraine, bits of territory in the East, the Polish corridor, etc., Germany was left intact. A similar policy *vis-à-vis* France and Britain would have been most unlikely if Germany had won. Imperial Germany's war aims—as we now know from the documents—included the take-over of the French iron and steel industries, the acquisition of large territorial and economic assets, and other far-reaching measures of an expansionist kind. There was to be an entirely new order in Europe, which would have been not so very different from the one Hitler tried to establish, except for the racist philosophy.

—So, in answer to Sidney Hook's point, you are saying that Nazism of one sort or another was bound to occur on the loser's side in post-World-War-I Europe. But what about Russia? Would Stalinism have arisen if the Germans under the Kaiser had won the War? Bolshevism had already arisen, thanks partly to the good offices of the Kaiser's government who provided Lenin and his entourage with a sealed train, guaranteeing their safe passage through Germany. Wouldn't the severe conditions of Brest-Litovsk have been made even more punishing if the German Reich *had triumphed in the West as well as in the East?*

TREVOR-ROPER: The Germans did, indeed, impose an extremely tough treaty on the Bolsheviks which Lenin had great difficulty in persuading his Party to accept. Russia was being deprived of its Ukrainian food-basket, a third of its European territory, three-quarters of its coal and iron industry, and so on. The rump of Russia that remained was under internal attack and was hovering on the brink of economic collapse. If Germany had won in the West as well, I doubt whether the Kaiser's government would have tolerated the rule of the Bolshevik rabble on the territory of its enfeebled eastern neighbour. It would have regarded the threat of chaos and anarchy coming from Moscow as a threat to the *Reich* and the established order of Europe—as indeed it turned out to be, for in 1918 and 1919 there were Communist coups, or attempted coups, in Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, and a host of other major German cities, as also in Hungary.

A victorious Germany would have stamped out open Communism, but I have no doubt that Communism would eventually have survived as a radical underground heresy. If Lenin and Leninism had, by some miracle, nevertheless survived, then our hypotheses multiply at such a rate that any speculation becomes meaningless.

HOW WOULD *you answer the second part of my question . . . the future of Russia without a mission, whether a mission of Czarism, of a particularly pristine Russo-Christianity, of Pan-Slavism, or of Communist ideology? Russia has, by the testimony of many of her writers, always felt unworthy of her true self without a message transcending the narrow interests of the Russian people. For example, Mikhail Petrovich Pogodin had this to say about Russia's "manifest destiny" in the 1830s:*

> **"Who dares to pretend that the goal of humanity has been achieved or kept in sight by any of the states of Europe? In one country we see more knowledge, in another more production, more comfort, in a third more welfare, but where is the 'sacred good'? . . . It is the Golden Calf, the mammon, to which without exception all Europe pays homage. Should there not be a higher level of a new European civilisation, of Christian civilisation? America, on which our contemporaries have pinned their hopes for a time, has meanwhile clearly revealed the vices of her illegitimate birth. She is no state, but rather a trading company. . . . Oh Russia, oh my Fatherland! . . . You, you are chosen to consummate, to crown the development of humanity, to embody all the various human achievements . . . in one great synthesis, to bring to harmony the ancient and modern civilisations, to reconcile heart and reason, to establish true justice and peace."**
>
> ***Letter on Russian History* (1837)**

TREVOR-ROPER: You can have a residue of power which has outlived its original doctrinal impulse. Whether you can have one which has *totally* outlived such an impulse, I'm not sure; but in the case of Soviet Communism I cannot imagine that it would be totally extinct. I have suggested that there would be some kind of heresy, or that it would be adapted rather as you suggested in the case of the evolution of Christianity—which was, after all, originally a religion of the outcasts but was later adapted to be the state religion of the autocratic Byzantine Empire and of medieval feudal Europe. Ideologies are elastic. I do not envisage the pos-

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sibility of the total evaporation of Communism in Russia or in China, but I do think it will lose its revolutionary impetus, as Christianity did.

The Empire could be maintained without a paramount ideology, although it would probably have to be a reduced empire. Let us not forget that much of the Russian Empire was formed independently of Communism, by naked conquest, in the 19th century—before Marx, or in total ignorance of Marx. Much of it was and is Muslim, and cannot have been conquered either in the name of Christianity or of Pan-Slavism. The Czars used brute force or the threat of force, and populated the empty spaces with Russian settlers. The same process could go on even after the expiry of a central doctrine, provided that Moscow's will-to-rule was unimpaired.

BUT WHETHER *it* **can** *remain unimpaired under contemporary conditions, which demand philosophical justification—that, it would seem to me, is the crucial question. And the truths that have come to light under Gorbachov's reformism appear to be undermining that philosophical justification. In the name of* **what** *can the Kremlin now justify the preservation of the Soviet Empire, seeing that for virtually the whole of Soviet history, after the death of Lenin, it has been ruled by fools and criminals, and has not only failed to catch up with the civilised world, but been so badly left behind that, in the late 1980s, it cannot even properly feed and house its population? The Soviet rulers' "mandate of heaven" is by now surely exhausted.*

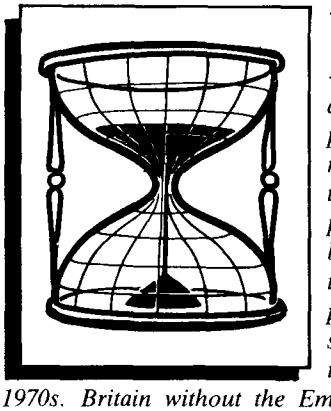
TREVOR-ROPER: Well, I rate doctrinal legitimation less highly than you do. The Kremlin could go on ruling by the exercise of its mere residual power, which is still formidable.

Think of Islam. In its first generation after the Prophet, Islam was a radical, crusading, expansionist movement. Almost all the great conquests were carried out very quickly, in that one generation. Then it was gradually institutionalised and became the state religion of various Khalifates and monarchies which acquired great wealth and lived in great splendour. The austere, fundamentalist impetus all but evaporated, but the Islamic institutions remained intact and became centres of power, periodically reinvigorated by fundamentalist revival. With the Ottoman Turks, Muslim militancy revived and the Ottoman Empire became a great power threatening all Europe.

In the last twenty years or so we have witnessed an astonishing recrudescence of Muslim fundamentalism under the auspices of the Shi'ite branch of Islam. It is true that the Ottoman state survived into the 20th century, in part at least, because there was a stalemate in the European balance-of-power, but the relevant fact is that it did survive at a time when it was ideologically empty of content. Ultimately, of course, it collapsed; but I don't see why the Soviet Empire should not be able to have a long after-life, with nothing but the sheer power of a great state to keep it going.

In applying these parallels to Soviet Russia, we are, incidentally, generalising from a very narrow base because we are assuming that Gorbachov will last, and this is making a large assumption. He may or may not; and even if he does, the liberalising Gorbachov may, under certain conditions, turn into a repressive Gorbachov. There are, indeed, signs that he may already have started going down that road. The fate of Kerensky and Khrushchev are reminders of the fragility of liberalising change in Russian politics. And there were liberal Czars—but not for long.

3. The Recognition of Shock



HUGH SETON-WATSON *once said to me, apropos of British and French reactions to Imperial Decline, that France remained France even after the loss of the French overseas possessions, but Britain had been so closely identified with the Empire that the loss of it produced a profound loss of self-confidence and the relative decline of the 1960s and 1970s. Britain without the Empire was only half a nation. Assuming that we accept his analysis, would the loss of the Soviet Empire generate an analogous disorientation in the Russian people?*

TREVOR-ROPER: The loss of an empire always produces psychological consequences. You *could* say that when we lost America in the 18th century, we were only marginally concerned; English politics went on as before. But no, there was a great *crise de conscience* which it took some time to overcome. When the Spaniards lost their Empire in Europe they went into a period of introversion, and again when they lost their Empire in America. If the Russians were to lose their control of Eastern Europe, I don't think that would have quite so much of an effect, because they have only controlled Eastern Europe since 1945; but if nationalism were to stake out claims in White Russia and the Ukraine, as it is doing in the Baltic States, that could have a traumatic impact on the Russian psyche and might generate a profound intellectual and political turbulence.

—What form might this take?

TREVOR-ROPER: What often happens historically is that after the first major defeat, if a people doesn't accept that defeat and is capable of reasserting itself, it embraces an extreme form of nationalism. Seldom is an imperialist drive finally defeated at the first check. The next generation—the sons of the original imperialists—tends to react against the crusading spirit, the heroism and the sacrifices that were extracted from the people by their fathers. They say "No" to imperialism. They are like the sons of self-made millionaires who renounce the entrepreneurial spirit of their fathers. "Of

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course", they say, "we could spend our whole lives making money as our fathers did, but to what end? The purpose of life is living. Let us sit back and enjoy what we've inherited. . . ." The generation after that—the grandsons—tries again.

We can see a similar pattern in the history of empires—the tremendous effort of the Spaniards in the 16th century and the check in the next generation. In the generation of the reign of Philip III, imperialist expansionism stopped and the Spanish ruling class relaxed and enjoyed their gains. But in the generation after that, the generation of the *grandsons*, the imperial drive was resumed and Spain had another try. And that was the last time. After the second defeat, imperialism expires.

Look at French history: there we see the immense effort of the revolutionary and Napoleonic period, the conquest of Europe followed by a period of stagnation and relaxation. But then, in 1848, imperialism reasserts itself. We can observe the same in German history: after the revolutionary unification of Germany under Bismarck, we see the drive to world power under William II, culminating in World War I. That drive is checked and the mood of the Weimar Republic is anti-War and anti-Army; but then the *grandsons* come along, providing the energy and "idealism" (if one may use that phrase) for a second attempt, under Hitler; and the second attempt was final, as it was in other cases too. I'm not frightened of the Germans now.

—How would your periodisation fit the Soviet case? I suppose it might, if we said that the great period of energetic state-building and imperial expansionism comprised the whole stretch of Soviet history from 1917 to the death of Brezhnev, and that the ingratitude of the "sons" seeking a more settled life and the enjoyment of consumer goods started only with Gorbachov—which would leave us with the prospect of another Soviet try by the "grandsons" of Stalin. . . .

TREVOR-ROPER: We have, in the case of Russia, no valid case for comparison. The Soviet Union did not have its Napoleonic period of aggressive expansion. Russia was, after all, *attacked* in 1941 and fought a defensive war, even though that defensive war produced the effect of enlarging the Empire. We must be wary of too much generalisation. What we can safely say is that under Brezhnev the Soviet Union acquired, by subtle or less subtle imperialistic means, a maritime Empire—largely because, in the wake of Viet Nam, the Americans were unwilling to stand up to them. But this has proved to be an imperial over-stretch which the Soviet economy could not sustain. Hence the Gorbachov retrenchment. Whether the next Russian generation will summon the energy for another try at imperialism is a matter of conjecture.

TO RETURN TO *my question: Do you foresee the type of intellectual-political crisis gripping the Russian political class after the loss of the Empire as gripped Austria after the collapse of the House of Habsburg, or Britain in the 1960s and 1970s? Would there be a crisis of self-confidence, a tendency to say* "Russia has lost an empire and has not yet found a role", *as Dean Acheson remarked about Britain in 1962 (causing at the time great—though to my mind unwarranted—offence to the British political élite)?*

TREVOR-ROPER: One can make long-term predictions on a geopolitical and perhaps economic base, but one cannot make safe predictions on the base of human responses. The standard instance for me is the prediction by Alexis de Tocqueville, and indeed by many other less well-known writers, in the early and middle 19th century, that the great powers of the future would be Russia and America. That could be predicted because in the age of railway-building and generally increased communications it was becoming clear that the mobilisation of great land masses was going to be possible, whereas hitherto it had been impossible. That prediction came true.

Another instance is the geopolitical predictions of Sir Halford Mackinder, published in 1919. He predicted that whoever controlled what he called "the Heartland", which was Central and Eastern Europe, would control the whole world. But when he applied that prediction, he said that the controlling power of the world would be Czarist Russia. He has been proved right in forecasting that it would be Russia—that's how it has worked out—but it's not *Czarist* Russia. The human response, the political response, cannot be foreseen.

Hitler set great store by Mackinder's geopolitics as interpreted by Mackinder's German disciple, Karl Haushofer. He aimed to conquer "the Heartland" because from there he thought he could control the rest of the world. His natural rival for that control was Russia. It was Russia, with her own huge land-armies, land-ambitions, and geopolitical outlook that had to be defeated before Germany could become "the Citadel of the World Empire".

I give these general instances to show that, although one can make a general prophecy, one can get the details wrong—and the detail, after all, can be rather important. In Hitler's case, the detail was whether the Germans or the Russians would be the ruling power. That struggle was fought out, and it was touch-and-go how it would end. But the geopolitical prophecy retained its validity.

I RESPECT *your reluctance to engage in what you clearly feel is idle speculation, but as historians are seldom appreciated by the general public unless they can tell us from their experience of the past what the future is most likely to hold, let me press you slightly on the point of imperial hangover.*

I do not think many people were worried after the fall of Austria-Hungary, or the French, Dutch or British Empires, that the metropolitan country would, in some post-imperial tantrum, start attacking its neighbours or dropping nuclear bombs on its former colonies. Austria, Britain, France and Holland threatened no one and were feared by no one, although they did suffer from a post-colonial shock.

May not Russia be different? Russia has been an aspirant

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to greatness and world respect both under the Czars and under the Bolsheviks. In the last three decades she achieved, militarily at least, her coveted rendezvous with History, but failed to do so in any other respect. She may now have to contemplate the loss of this-or-that of her peripheral republics as well as her maritime influence. Will she take the hammer-blows of history with the same relative composure as the Austrians, the Dutch, and the British did? Isn't there, as historians tell us, a dark streak in the Russian character that inclines to anarchy and is more easily controlled when Russia is engaged in some large enterprise such as "Building Socialism", or making the world safe for it, than when Russia has no consecrated purpose?

TREVOR-ROPER: I draw back timidly when historical deductions are made from "the soul of the people". I realise that it can be done and that it has been done; but I don't like it, because it is a most uncertain base from which to argue. I regard the future as full of unpredictable possibilities. I can remember prophecies which seemed rational but proved to be wrong, and other cases where nobody had prophesied what actually happened. Short-term forecasts are certainly most perilous. In 1900, who would have forecast anything that happened in the 20th century—the demise of monarchies and empires . . . the rise of Fascism, Bolshevism, Nazism, and Maoism . . . the massacre of the Jews, Armenians, and Cambodians . . . the recrudescence of Muslim fundamentalism?

There is a remark of George Grote, the 19th-century historian of Greece, which sticks in my mind. Talking of the forms of government in ancient Greece he says that if Sparta had not existed no one would have thought that such a form of government was a possibility. It is indeed unique. It had no predecessor, and there has been no replica of it since. If Aristotle had projected it as a possible form of government, it would have been regarded as impractical and totally utopian. And yet it existed and endured.

Humanity has the capacity for more numerous forms of political organisation than anyone can safely prophesy. Who would have predicted Hitler's "Final Solution"? There was, to be sure, anti-Semitism in Germany, but there was a great deal more in France, Russia, and Poland. Who would have thought the German totalitarians would decide to exterminate a whole people?

BUT WOULD *you be prepared to accept that national stereotypes do contain some truth, or else they would not be stereotypes? I am not suggesting that they apply to all people all the time, but I would have thought it is fairly obvious that, for example, French, German and Russian political culture is more idea-oriented and more deductive than English or American political thinking, which is on the whole more inductive, practical and even utilitarian. Would this, as well as the testimony of Russian and German history, not imply that the Russian and German people are more at home in the world when they have an ideological compass to guide them than when they have none? The question that interests me is: now that the ideological battery of Communism is clearly exhausted, what will take its place? Who or what will fill the vacuum in the life of the Russian nation?*

TREVOR-ROPER: You press me where I am least willing to be pressed. I reluct against the suggestion that there are national proclivities embedded in particular people. I get round this problem by persuading myself that these so-called "national peculiarities" are by-products of social organisation (and that, I suppose, is a form of Marxism).

I go to Germany a certain amount now. The present generation of Germans is exempt from Nazism. They seem to me Europeans in a way they were not before the terrible experience of Hitler, the War, the defeat and total destruction of their political system, cleared away a lot of Germany's ideological foundations. When I was young and went to Germany, I found I deeply disliked the Germans' mentality. I refused to go there after a time because I found the attitude of the people I met so disagreeable. But now I positively enjoy going to Germany. There has been a profound change in German attitudes. This fortifies my scepticism about the permanence of national characteristics.

BUT AREN'T *some national characteristics more obvious and permanent than others? Political and cultural pluralism on German-speaking territories is an old and famous phenomenon: it is Hitler that has to be explained rather than the return of Germany to the spirit of the Peace of Augsburg.*

In Russia, however, the tradition of tolerance and pluralism is extremely thin, while the tradition of autocracy is strong and continuous. To say of the Germans that they are born to be ruled by despots would obviously be wrong, but it is not so wrong to say that in Russia tolerance, and indeed support, of despotism of one sort or another is a national characteristic. Allow me to cite some evidence.

The Marquis de Custine, writing from Russia in 1839, quotes an excerpt from the correspondence of the Baron von Herberstein (Ambassador of the Emperor Maximilian to the court of Czar Vassili Ivanovich) to the effect that in Russia the will of the Czar is accepted as the will of God and blindly obeyed. Custine observes:

> **"This letter written more than three centuries ago paints the Russians of the time absolutely as I see the Russians of today. Like Maximilian's ambassador, I still ask myself whether it is the character of the nation that has made the autocrat, or the autocrat who has made the Russian character. . . . It seems to me, however, that the influence is reciprocal—the Russian government would never have been established anywhere other than Russia, nor would the Russians have become what they are under a different government. . . . It can be said of the Russians, great and small—they are intoxicated with slavery."**

But it would be unfair to stop with Custine. This is what General Walter Bedell Smith (who served as US Ambassador to Stalin's Russia from 1946 to 1949) wrote about Custine's book in 1951:

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"The analogy between Russia of 1839 and the Soviet Union today is so striking that one must pinch oneself to recall that Custine was writing more than a hundred years ago . . . . Custine's reflections on this strange society . . . led him to dire forebodings. . . . 'Russia sees Europe as a prey which our dissensions will sooner or later deliver up to her; she foments anarchy among us in the hope of profiting by a corruption she promotes because it is favourable to her views.' Did we think this was a Communist idea?"

Doesn't all this suggest that for four centuries (the 1550s to the 1950s), and arguably longer, there was a remarkable continuity in Russian political attitudes, and that it would be foolhardy for us to believe that the demise of the inspiration of Communism can fundamentally change what 400 years could not?

If, then, we discount the present period of relaxation as out of character, what form is the Russian reaction to the loss of empire most likely to take? A reversion to Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Slavophilism . . . some combination of these?

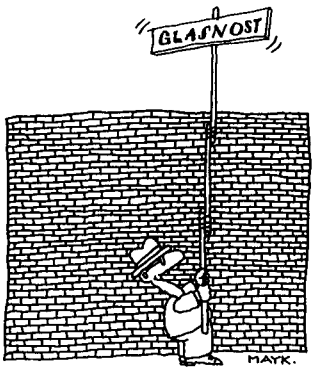
TREVOR-ROPER: Who can say? It could be any of these things—or something else quite unpredictable. Loss of empire can lead to various responses: recession, introversion, isolationism; or, on the other hand, aggression, internal or external "adventurism". Short of catastrophic defeat, such as the Germans suffered in 1918 and 1945, which drastically limits the options, the response depends on internal politics: who, or what party, captures power.

At present I would not expect a Russian Napoleon or a reincarnate Ivan the Terrible; the circumstances are not right for them. Nor do I foresee an appeal to Pan-Slavism. What other Slavs would heed such an appeal now? The Poles? The Czechs? The Yugoslavs? To all these Soviet Russia is the oppressor—not, as it could claim to be in the 19th century (though not to the Poles), the champion of oppressed Slav nations.

A more probable response is the capture of power by the hard-liners, a reimposition of the brutal authority which at present seems to be relaxed; but this will not solve the problems which such authority, in the past, has created. Of course there could be "adventurism", an attempt to escape from insoluble problems by diversionary aggression. It was a Russian statesman who, in 1904, recommended "a short, successful war" as a cure for internal unrest. It was not a success. But I do not really think that that is likely now, especially after the failure in Afghanistan. What problem would be solved even by a successful *Blitzkrieg* in Europe? It would only create far greater problems for the victor.

But, anyway, I do not accept your premise. If there is a consistent national character, I believe it is formed by historical experience. Russian historical experience is not merely one of slavish submission to tyranny: it is also one of patience, caution, tenacity in defence, readiness to retreat, rather than aggression, boldness in attack. This is radically different from the character formed by the Prussian experience, which was an experience of brilliantly successful, lightning aggression—though, now that such aggression has failed so disastrously (and twice), that tradition is, I believe, dead.

4. *Of Bridges & Walls*



IF THE SOVIET EMPIRE is now beginning to weaken along its ethnic faultlines, is the parallel with Austria-Hungary our nearest appropriate model for comparison? The disintegration of Austria-Hungary removed stability from the centre of Europe, and indeed destabilised the whole of Europe. Would the disintegration of the Soviet Empire act likewise? Does the Western world, therefore, have a tacit (if unmentionable) interest in keeping the red flag flying?

TREVOR-ROPER: Imperial power is a great stabiliser. We would not have the present troubles in Northern Ireland, or in Israel, or in South Africa—the three insoluble problems of our time—if imperial power, in this case British imperial power, still controlled those areas. Imperial power can take the sting out of nationalism by removing the element of insecurity. People know where they are as parts of an empire. *Pax Romana* kept the peace because of the overwhelming power of Rome. I certainly agree, therefore, with the statement that the decomposition of empires does create problems for world peace and world order.

Whether empires should be preserved for that reason is a matter of balance. We all know that the decomposition of Austria-Hungary created great uncertainty in Central Europe. The Ottoman Empire was preserved for some time because of its convenience for the Western powers—left to itself, it would have disintegrated much earlier than it did. Some powers were interested in its disintegration, others in its preservation. We in Britain were largely responsible for it being preserved; but, in the end, we helped the process which broke it up, as we also helped the process that broke up the Habsburg Empire. Whether one supports an imperial power once it has stopped being a menace to mankind and is properly civilised, or whether one backs the nationalist movements that can break it up, is a matter of national and international politics—of present politics. One cannot give a general answer.

—But hasn't "present politics" many faces? One of them is the world's ecological interdependence, on which our survival depends. This surely demands world government; but, short of that, an American "empire", a Soviet "empire", a European "empire" are the nearest things we can have to some form of ecological stability, or at least the hope of it. Similarly, in the nuclear age, world peace is an indispensable condition of human survival. That, again, would seem to be better protected by large universal states, "empires", than by so many wholly independent nations, each going its own selfish way. Or would it?

TREVOR-ROPER: Oh, I think it would, but the concept of empire has to be refined to make sense. The fact is that one

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kind of "empire", economic empire, already exists everywhere in the world. We are so economically interdependent that although we may please ourselves with the illusion that Ireland or some Latin American republic is independent, in fact, their independence is limited, because in economic terms they are not masters of their own fate. This applies to every country.

So there is already an Economic Empire in place in the world and there ought to be, as you suggest, an ecological one, too, if we are not to pollute ourselves out of existence. So I see a double layer of relationships: there should be economic and ecological cooperation under the rules of one imperium, but one should avoid, as far as possible, making it political. Of course, economic and ecological cooperation is bound to impinge on politics; but as we do not want to inflame nationalism and create opportunities for, say, Islamic fundamentalism, we must not allow the unavoidable "imperialism" of economic and ecological necessity to be converted into political imperialism.

YOU ARE *making a fine distinction, one which people gripped by the spirit of independence have always found hard to understand. I doubt whether, for example, a Kosovo Albanian could be swayed to accept the Serbian domination of his province on the argument that he is economically better off under Yugoslav rule than he would be outside it, either as a citizen of an independent country or one of Albania.*

But it seems to me that Soviet imperialism also presents us with a specifically Russian problem. In the British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Spanish and Portuguese Empires, the cultural superiority of the metropolitan country was on the whole accepted and often admired and indeed emulated by the colonial population. The prestige of the Soviet Empire is different. In "the Outer Empire"—that is to say, in, for example, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia—no one would be remotely prepared to recognise that Russian cultural superiority exists, much less that it could excuse the colonialism of the metropolitan nation. On the contrary, Poles, Hungarians and Czechs would stress their own cultural superiority over all things Russian. But even within "the Inner Empire", Georgians, Armenians, Moldavians, and a fortiori *the Baltic nations feel, for a variety of reasons (some more legitimate than others), that Russian culture and Russian standards of behaviour are inferior to their own and are not to be respected.*

What I'm saying is that the acceptance of British and French cultural superiority has given British and French institutions—and the English and French (and also the Dutch) language—a kind of charmed after-life in the former colonies. The cultural and technological "imperialism" of the West tacitly continues. I can foresee nothing analogous happening in the Soviet Union. The disintegration of the Soviet Empire is bound to be more drastic precisely because respect for the culture of the metropolitan nation does not exist.

TREVOR-ROPER: I wonder. Without wanting to go back to the Greeks' attitude to the Romans, let me just say that subjective judgments of cultural superiority and inferiority have not been uniformly decisive in shaping the impact of nations and empires. Sticking to modern times, the Rhineland Germans regarded Prussia as being backward, uncultured and philistine; but they yielded to Prussian power because they realised that it was necessary to create that envelope of German nationalism which they needed.

In the case of Austria-Hungary, the superiority of German culture and government institutions was, openly or implicitly, well recognised by all, even the Hungarians. That Empire nevertheless fell apart, partly at least because the various nations under Habsburg rule wanted to be politically independent, and looked upon their cultural underdevelopment (in so far as they admitted it) as something which would quickly be overcome. That some Austrian and Hungarian *K. und K.* [Imperial and Royal] institutions nevertheless survived in the successor states is a fact.

But it is, to my mind, equally possible that Russian institutions and cultural values might survive the winding-down of the Soviet Empire in countries such as Georgia, Armenia, and Uzbekistan. A residual post-Soviet *Russian* cultural imperialism is just as possible as the survival of English and French culture and institutions in many parts of the former British and French Empire, even though Georgians, Armenians and Uzbeks would be loth to admit that they have, or ever had, anything to learn from the Russians.

I SUPPOSE *what we are saying is that neither economic underdevelopment nor cultural underdevelopment has a decisive influence on shaping national attitudes. When the chips are down, national sentiment, the call of tradition, feuds, and irredentism—that is to say, irrational, visceral factors—tend to determine the amount of peace we can have among nations.*

TREVOR-ROPER: Yes, and all the more important in an economically and ecologically interdependent world to keep those irrational factors within limits.

—Left to themselves, nations seem to have a curious order of priorities: independence first, prosperity second, internal freedom and democracy only third. . . .

TREVOR-ROPER: What I'm saying is that the order of priorities has, in effect, already been eroded because no country can, in the 1990s, consider itself to be fully sovereign or independent. The sovereignty and independence of all of us is now highly qualified sovereignty and independence.

—If you were President Bush or Margaret Thatcher, and had to deal with the question of the desirability, or undesirability, of promoting the disintegration of the Soviet Empire at one of your Cabinet meetings, how would you advise your colleagues? Would you say to them:

> **"Like it or not, we've got to help Gorbachov to keep the red flag flying, because the alternatives to the Soviet Empire would be so much more terrible: chaos in the**

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Balkans and Central Europe, the reopening of the whole German question, of the quarrel over the Polish frontiers, the erosion of NATO and so on. . . ."

TREVOR-ROPER: This is precisely what we said about the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century. Our liberals and romantics were all on the side of the nationalist movements, arguing that the Bulgars, Greeks and Macedonians must be free and Ottoman oppression must vanish. But in Tory Establishment circles your argument was used. It was said: "If we listened to our liberals and romantics we would be injecting disorder into Europe and upsetting the balance of power. So long as the containing envelope of Ottoman imperialism can be sustained, we sustain it. It is better than the alternatives. . . ."

But then it transpired at the end of the century that it could no longer be sustained, because the Empire was facing internal collapse. So, politics being the art of the possible, we decided not to sustain it and to back the disgruntled nations and nationalities.

—Egon Bahr, the German Social Democratic Party's chief foreign policy adviser, said on German television recently that it is not only the Soviet leadership that keeps the Berlin Wall standing, but also the Americans—who have an interest in maintaining European stability and thus the stability of the Soviet Union. Isn't this close to what you are saying?

TREVOR-ROPER: Yes, it is—but in making comparisons we have to look at the objective circumstances. As I've just said, in the earlier parts of the 19th century and, indeed, in some sense right through the 19th century, the British government regarded the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire as being in the general interest of peace and the correct balance of power. By the turn of the century, however, the mood had changed. Nationalism was on the march; it had prevailed in Germany and Italy, and it was undermining the internal cohesion of both Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Our policy, therefore, changed too.

If the Soviet Empire can no longer be relied upon to keep the peace but is likely to become the home of uncontrollable national dissensions, then I have no doubt that our governments will no longer consider the Soviets our partners in stability, and will switch from talking to Moscow to supporting the dissenting nations of the empire. This is already happening in our relations with the East-Central European countries, especially Poland and Hungary, which can quite obviously not be contained within the imperial mould.

Now, you cited Egon Bahr on the Berlin Wall and the alleged American interest in keeping it in place. Let me say this: one reason for the division of Germany in 1945 was because the Russians and the West were afraid that the weight of a united Germany under a revived Nazism or militarism could once again become a threat to their security. This, I believe, is no longer so—the objective circumstances have changed.

Let me point again to my slightly metaphysical theory that a nation's drive towards imperial domination happens only twice: the Spaniards tried twice, the French tried twice, and the Germans tried twice—and they are not going to try again. They got such a bloody nose in 1945 that even the generation of grandchildren—and that is the generation now growing up in Germany—knows better than to attempt to start thinking in terms of imperial power. Germany today is a country of highly civilised Europeans who have renounced the historical mission implicit in their national policy from 1870 to 1945. I do not, therefore, regard the unification of Germany as being a potential military threat to the security of the world, and I can see no justification for the Berlin Wall. A united Germany could, of course, become an economic power which would dominate Europe (even the Federal Republic, on its own, does this to a large extent), but it would not be a great military power. The division of Germany has, therefore, lost a major cause which brought it into being.

The real question raised by the prospect of German reunification is whether unification is possible, in the light of the separate existence of the two Germanies over almost half a century—whether the mechanical separation which has created two different social systems may make the two Germanies difficult or impossible to reunite. My own feeling is that the German people's sense of cultural unity is more important—has deeper historical roots—than their demand for political unity. When Germany was split into nearly 400 principalities, its only unity was cultural unity. It is quite possible that this sense of cultural unity will prove a substitute for a restored political unity, and this might be a good thing for both Germany and Europe.

AT THE *risk of digressing for a moment, doesn't this raise a sensitive and (until the problem of modernising the* Lance *missile gave it fresh relevance) a much-avoided issue: Germany's role in a post-Soviet Europe? British opinion seems to be divided. On one side we have people like Norman Stone (Professor of Modern History at Oxford University) and Peregrine Worsthorne (of "The Sunday Telegraph"), who argue that reunification would be a great cultural gain and a way of fitting an underdeveloped Russia into a peaceful European framework. On the other we have sceptics such as Roger Scruton (Professor of Philosophy at London University), who criticises Germany both for her alleged neutralism and for her aggressive idealism. The latter, he thinks, can be switched without difficulty from the adoration of Hitler to the admiration of Gorbachov.*

For example, Norman Stone wrote ("Sunday Telegraph", 23 April 1989) after a recent visit to Germany:

"She [the Federal Republic] is, easily, the outstanding European country. She fulfils the role that we used to fulfil of combining economic efficiency, educational excellence and all-round seriousness with political liberalism and respect for people's rights; she is now, in my opinion, the model European country. She is very well placed to offer a bridge by which Communist Russia can cross into the European family. . . ."

And Peregrine Worsthorne said, two weeks later ("Sunday Telegraph", 7 May 1989):

"Twice in the past Germany has done incalculable harm

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. . . . Now its people have a new and incontrovertibly noble dream. Suspicion among the allies there is bound to be; fear, too. . . . Yet they are beginning to ring a little hollow, sound a sour note. For if Europe, the cradle of civilisation, is ever to become whole and healthy again, only Germany, in conjunction with the Russians, can bring this miracle about. . . ."

TREVOR-ROPER: I broadly agree with Stone and Worsthorne. I have no fears of a revival of aggressive German militarism. In any case, the leading powers, Russia and the USA, are so much more powerful nowadays than they were 50 years ago that they would dwarf the power even of a united Germany. So I do not regard the unification of Germany as *per se* very important. Everything depends on the circumstances.

5. *Facts & Follies in History*

TO RETURN TO the break-up of empires—aren't our policies towards the Soviet Union most inconsistent? We say, on the one hand, that it is in our interest to support the Soviet Empire so long as it is a guarantor of stability; but we also say in our public diplomacy to the constituent elements of the Soviet empire—Estonians, Latvians, Uzbeks, Georgians, Armenians—that we want them to be free and sovereign. Talking to the nations of the broader empire—Hungarians, Czechs and Poles—we say this quite openly, while talking to those of the USSR proper we say it by encouraging "national consciousness . . . economic and cultural sovereignty . . ." and the like. But our message is clear. How can we hope to draw stability from the Soviet Empire when we are, in effect, trying to destabilise it?

TREVOR-ROPER: Our talk about sovereignty is mere rhetoric. There is no such thing as complete sovereignty for small nations. They can have internal sovereignty, they can have autonomy, but they are not free to conduct independent politics on a world scale. They are parts of imperial systems, although not necessarily politically imperial systems, and they are constrained by economic pressures. It would be wrong if we neglected to mention these simple facts of modern life in addressing the nations of the USSR and Eastern Europe.

—But how would you answer a Pole who said to you: "The world is making a great hue and cry about giving independence to Namibia—but not to Poland. Does an old Christian nation in the middle of Europe deserve fewer rights and less respect than the tribesmen of West Africa?"

TREVOR-ROPER: I believe that the Poles should be independent, but they would have to realise that their independence would not be complete. It would be political independence; but even a most independent Poland would still not be fully in control of its destiny, because it would remain very much a dependent element of the world economy. Just as the economy of the Irish Republic is really dependent on that of Britain, so the economy of the East European states—even if we regarded them as politically independent, as they were before the War—would, in fact, be dependent on either Russia or Germany.

Bulgaria in World War II is a good example. Whatever the Bulgarian people wanted to be, they had to be pro-German because the alternative was being dominated by the Soviet Union. They might not like German control, they might feel that they owed a debt to the Russians who had liberated them from the Turks and created modern Bulgaria; but nevertheless, after the Russian Revolution, if they did not want to be communised, they had to come under German control because they were economically dependent. Even so, they did not declare war on the Soviet Union in 1941 because popular feeling against a move of that kind was well known to the government. But it was the Bulgarians' *de facto* dependence, behind the outward trappings of formal independence, that decided their role in the War, with all its well-known consequences.

An independent Poland might find itself, *mutatis mutandis*, in a similar situation. I would be entirely in favour of the Poles having all the independence they had between the Wars. But it would not be full independence; an invisible imperialism would remain. When we talk about spheres of influence that, I assume, is what we mean.

—Had you been in the position of Wickham Steed or R. W. Seton-Watson, would you have worked for the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, as they did?

TREVOR-ROPER: Let me try to be precise about this: had I myself been contemplating the advantages and disadvantages of preserving the Habsburg Empire in, shall we say, 1910-1918, I would probably not have wanted its dismemberment. But, of course, if I had been Steed or Seton-Watson—that is to say, a liberal romantic, my mind formed by the liberal nationalism of the late 19th century—then I would no doubt have acted as they did. They were children of their time, and so probably would I have been.

—Would it have been possible to foresee in 1905 or 1910 that the dissolution of Austria-Hungary would destabilise the peace of Europe?

TREVOR-ROPER: I think it would, but that does not mean that it could have been prevented once the War had started. I believe Austria-Hungary might perhaps have been saved if the Empire's nationalities' policy had been less repressive. The Hungarian part of the Monarchy was the main culprit. It was ruled by an aristocracy and bureaucracy which treated the South Slavs, Slovaks and Romanians under their control as subject races. Had the Hungarians agreed to give the Croats autonomy under a trilateral arrangement with Vienna, the Monarchy might have been preserved. I say "might" because we cannot be certain: the racial problem of

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the Habsburg Monarchy was perhaps insoluble. After the loss of the Italian provinces, the great defeat at Königgrätz in 1866, and the introduction of Dualism with Hungary in 1867, the imperial government was too weak and frightened to act in a liberal way and was unable to provide that thin, loose envelope of imperialism that would have retained the loyalty of its subject races.

Whether the Croats gained by being "set free" and then subjected to Belgrade rather than to Vienna and Budapest, is an open question. They had a hearty dislike of the Orthodox Serbs who, they felt, had been barbarised by long Turkish rule, whereas they themselves had profited from the more civilised rule of the Catholic Habsburgs. Nevertheless, at the end of World War I, Yugoslav rule meant liberation. But I'm not sure how long this feeling persisted. It was certainly in ruins by the time of the German invasion of Yugoslavia in 1941, and has never fully recovered from the ferocity of the Serbo-Croatian conflict during the War.

The rationale, durability and usefulness of empires has to be judged in the light of all circumstances; that is the only safe rule.

CAN YOU ENVISAGE *Gorbachov saying to some of his more realistic colleagues in the Politburo: "We are over-extended—we cannot indefinitely force restive Poles, Hungarians and Czechs to stay within the Stalinist frontiers. Doing so has cost us extraordinary economic sacrifices and our reputation in the world. We are going to raid Lenin for suitable quotations to justify what we are doing—'Russia as the prison of nations being turned into free and democratic states', that sort of thing. We'll do our best to make the transition slow and shock-free, and we'll exact as many concessions from the West as the traffic will bear—in exchange for 'voluntarily' doing what we are being forced to do in any case. So let's look at the books again, and quote chapter-and-verse for reducing the domains of socialism in the name of Lenin and in the language of Lenin. . . ."*

Can you see Gorbachov taking that sort of attitude? Is he already doing it?

TREVOR-ROPER: The great advantage of chapter-and-verse is that you can choose your chapters and verses, and prove almost anything.

I go back to your original analogy with Christianity. The early Christians believed in the Second Coming; they believed it was going to happen quite soon and that the Roman Empire would be utterly destroyed. And they could produce good scriptural texts to support these beliefs. But when the Second Coming did not materialise, and the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the religion of the state, these doctrines became embarrassing; so they were declared heretical and were suppressed. The Church then reinterpreted the scriptures and emphasised other texts which would support the new view.

Nevertheless, the early Christian doctrines, together with the de-selected parts of the scriptures which had supported them, resurfaced after a time and eventually fuelled the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. They gave rise to a new Messianism and injected into Christianity a new revolutionary content. The Protestantism of Elizabethan England, the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations, the Protestant international at the time of the Thirty Years' War, the Huguenots, were all inspired by heresies which had been driven out of the Church more than a millennium before. It is, therefore, perfectly possible that the scriptures of Marx and Lenin, too, will be found to contain heresies which were thrust aside in the Stalinist period and will provide an ideologically acceptable framework for the reduction and reformation of the Soviet empire.

—The current reform of the Soviet economy in the name of the NEP period of the 1920s is one sign that Gorbachov and his friends **are** *busy ransacking the books for the right quotations.*

TREVOR-ROPER: If continuity in the Soviet domains is to be preserved, the reforms will have to be enacted in the name of the Church—but suitable texts will no doubt be found.

—I often wonder, though, whether Marxism-Leninism isn't so inherently absurd that no reform of it will work at the turn of the second millennium. An heretical expression of something nonsensical remains nonsensical no matter how radical the heresy. After all, Marx's thinking is contemporaneous with the invention of the steam engine and pre-dates the electric light-bulb. History has refuted all his main tenets, from the pauperisation of the proletariat to the expectation that nationalism would disappear under the pressures of international class solidarity.

TREVOR-ROPER: There is a prohibitive absurdity in almost all ideologies—which does not stop them from being taught and accepted. After all, Christianity contains dogmas which are today impossible for an educated person to believe; but we obediently repeat them.

*—But isn't there a difference of appeal between the two? The core of the Christian faith has always been transcendental. Christianity never claimed to be open to rational understanding alone, and Christians have no hesitation in saying "*Credo quia absurdum est*". I can, therefore, see that an heretical interpretation of Christianity will be no more absurd, in Christian terms, than the orthodox interpretation. But this is not so in the case of Marxism.*

Marxism claims to be scientific, empirical, and predictive. When **it** *goes wrong by the testable evidence of the economy, for example, everything about it goes wrong. It can, therefore, not ask us to extend our confidence to a revised, heretical interpretation. Marxism has, indeed, now shown itself to be wholly absurd in the sense of being inapplicable and unusable on its own terms.*

TREVOR-ROPER: I have to surrender to that. . . .

—Do you think sophisticated scientists and technologists in the various Soviet academic cities and think-tanks would be willing to put up with even a revised Bolshevik ideology?

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TREVOR-ROPER: Yes, I do. Ideologies can be revamped to an extraordinary extent. They can go into reverse while lip-service is still paid to the orthodoxy. Stalinism, too, was a revised ideology, because Marxism denies that "great men" can have a decisive impact on the design of history. Whatever Gorbachov may now be saying about the evils of Stalinism, his own highly concentrated leadership is a back-handed compliment to the Stalinist heresy—it would be hard to imagine a Gorbachov revolution without Gorbachov.

SUPPOSE THE SOVIET SYSTEM *rendered itself meaningless by the force of its own reforms, or was eliminated by the passions of nationalists, economic decentralisers, and the liberal intelligentsia—would a Russia emptied of the international appeal of Marxism-Leninism, but strengthened by Russian nationalism, be an "empire" with which we could more easily live than the present one?*

TREVOR-ROPER: I don't think so. Russian nationalism is subterranean but very much alive. It might in certain circumstances, if the Soviet system were to expire, find resonance in some of the other Slav nations and become a menace. Personally, I would prefer to see lip-service being paid to Communism, because this would be the mere repetition of an empty ritual, far safer for the rest of the world than an exacerbated Russian nationalism. A Russian nationalist government, with all the military and industrial power built up in 72 years of Bolshevism, is not a prospect any European country would be happy to contemplate.

—Aren't you echoing the voice of 19th-century British imperialism? Support the Ottoman Empire because it keeps the Czar away from the Dardanelles—keep the Soviet Empire going because a Russian nationalist empire is liable to make even more mischief in Central and Eastern Europe than Stalin's Russia has been doing. . . .

TREVOR-ROPER: Yes—in the 19th century it was vital for us in Britain to keep the shipping lanes to India and the Far East open, and the Dardanelles were a key element of our security. In the nuclear age, the prevention of any warlike conflict has become the predominant British and European interest. This is, in my opinion, probably better served by the preservation of an ideologically de-gutted and economically limping Soviet Empire than by a Russian nationalist successor-state.

—Don't you think, though, that we would be giving hostages to fortune if we helped to uphold the skeletal remains of a system that threatened to bury us only a few years ago? Might the skeleton not be filled out with flesh as rapidly as it lost its vital energy in the 1980s?

TREVOR-ROPER: Of course it might. "Anything can happen in history"—that is my somewhat unhelpful view. We can only legislate for our own period to the extent that we can foresee events with some hope of accuracy. Before Marxism emerged, the movement which carried a comparable programme of internationalism and rationality was the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment led to the French Revolution. Who predicted the French Revolution? Nobody did. Even in the early 1780s nobody had the faintest idea that a great revolution would sweep France, and no one was more shocked by its development than the writers and philosophers to whose teaching it was afterwards ascribed.

One can make conditional prophecies saying: if this-or-that were to happen, then such-and-such a development is most likely; and one can buttress that vague forecast with analogies drawn from the past. But the German idea that history has rules, and that if we learn these rules we can predict the future (Hegel, Marx, Spengler, and many other German historians thought in those terms), seems to me to be based on the wrong premises. I find it no more persuasive than the historical prophecies deduced from Scripture or from the works of Arnold Toynbee.

MY FEAR *is that if today we preserved the Soviet Communist empire as a stabiliser, it might, in true Hegelian fashion, turn the tables on us and become a destabiliser again tomorrow. Man's search for Utopia is always with us, and those conducting the search have seldom shown any inclination to profit from the disasters of the past.*

You may not rate Arnold Toynbee highly as an historian, but perhaps you will agree with me that he was a man of wide experience. In a conversation about a similar topic in 1972, Toynbee said to me:

> **"This non-learning from patent facts—this obstinate and persistent non-learning makes me pessimistic . . . the power of blinding ourselves to patent facts seems to be almost insuperable."**

Are we, do you think, going to be immune from the next outbreak of Bolshevism if the bacteria of Bolshevism are now preserved for the sake of world stability?

TREVOR-ROPER: I doubt whether there could be an outbreak again. Communism has had a good run and has revealed itself to be a failure. It has now shot its bolt, and I don't believe that anyone except a few people irrevocably committed to Utopia will try to build a governmental system on it. The ideology will probably survive in heretical forms and in unlikely places, but if it is world stability that must be our first concern today, as surely it must, then I am satisfied that an ideologically defunct, territorially reduced, and internationally assimilated Soviet empire is more likely to serve our interests than the chaos that would follow its uncontrolled disintegration.

—I keep coming back to my tentative parallel with National Socialism. Would we be taking the same line if a de-Hitlerised, territorially reduced, and internationally cooperative Nazi empire happened to be our partner in maintaining world stability? And if so, wouldn't we be betraying our trust as a free and democratic civilisation?

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TREVOR-ROPER: This seems a simple parallel; but once we analyse it, it becomes less simple, since the implicit circumstances are entirely different. The Russians were our Allies in the War. We emerged victorious. We set up the present European system which, with all its defects, has lasted. It is now a question of amending it in one part of Europe.

But you are supposing a totally different situation, in which Hitler has won his war and set up his robber-empire. We are defeated and disarmed. The whole continent is under Nazi domination. Its governments are puppet governments. There is no balance of power. Against this, while it lasts, there can only be resistance movements. This cannot be called stability; or at least it is not a kind of stability that any of us would wish to preserve.

However, moving on to a general plane, I believe that we must always recognise the limits of the possible. In a crisis we accepted the alliance of Stalinist Russia, whose criminal record at that time was worse than that of Nazi Germany. We have had diplomatic relations with Mao's China. One generation is not responsible for the acts of its predecessors. I would have no objection to dealing with a government whose origins were tainted, provided that we did so with our eyes open, for rationally defensible purposes, and from an independent position. But in the scenario which you assume, we would not be independent. So the parallel is not a true parallel.

If Hitler had won the War, I find it impossible to imagine the state of Europe today. We lose ourselves in such speculations.

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The Old Man of the Sea

And if I died, it was only words that died,
a version of me. Do not think
I am to be crushed by a stone's
insensible edges. Do not think
that I would blacken with the page
and break into flame. Do not imagine
I could ever leave this island,
which is the world. Wherever there is a garden
you will find me if you seek for me,
and if you do not seek me I am there
nevertheless—squatting beneath the trumpets
of a jacaranda tree, or
beside the mossed shoulders of a rock
licked by water. . . .

Under the waters of my dreams I have dreamt many deaths,
and this in particular:
after the sweet wine, after the fumes of the gourd,
after the sea's thin music which was mine and no other's,
this in particular:
a mouth closed around the world and swallowed it like an oyster.

. . . The apricot swells
and on its skin there is a down
like on the soft flesh of a girl. From the hills
in a slender lode of silver comes the stream,
and you delight in the pleated
transparencies of water. Time lies
like the kind play of sunlight on your arm.
Soon you will discover me,
the parasite at the heart of paradise
with the skin of a cow. Legs locked about your neck,
I do not aim to let go. Think of me
as the form taken by necessity—
an old man in a garden on a page in a book,
squatting within the sound of the sea.

Richard Poole

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Val Warner

His Will

"I'LL BE in the other room if you want me." She didn't answer the scruffy young man. She wished he would go away. It was very intrusive of him to hang around in her time of grief. Looking into the middle distance to avoid his apathetic grey eyes, she looked out of the window at the tree-tops on the Inch, already touched by autumn. She might find peace among their auburn heads if she were alone—her husband didn't count. She wished she'd known before that her son's room had so nice a view. All in all, she'd not imagined such a nice little flat as this, although she knew Perth was a nice town and she'd been very pleased when she'd learnt her late son had moved here from Dundee which, decades out of date, she associated with jute mills rather than unemployment and Timex. Still, she'd feared Reggie was cooped up in some back-street attic. Reading between the lines of his rare letters, she did not imagine his work back-stage at Perth Rep. was very well paid. But this view. . . . She felt a shade resentful about the burnished trees, as if they'd cheated her of something.

She turned to the young man. It was no use expecting her husband to say anything. "Thank you for showing us round. We'll just have a little quiet time here." It was dismissive. What she wanted was to roam round on her own, to absorb a lasting picture of the little flat, as if she'd been a frequent visitor here and were not in fact seeing it for the first time. It was inconceivable that he was worried about theft—by them! In any case, what bric-à-brac there was belonged to her now. Apparently there wasn't a will and, even if one turned up, obviously everything would come to them, as Reggie was a bachelor. There'd be no money, but the sentimental value of his possessions would be beyond price. Already, she saw a certain white china poodle installed on the kitchen window-sill in Berkshire—too vulgar for the drawing-room.

"There's no need to wait. You can leave the key with us. We'll leave it . . . somewhere", she finished lamely. Why should she have to concern herself with these practicalities in the face of her overmastering grief? The only time she'd really felt her son's death was in her orgasmic tempest of weeping in her bedroom after the phone call, while Howard in his imperturbable way was dealing with his loss in the drawing-room below with his pipe and *The Daily Telegraph*. Even here, he'd simply slumped down in the nearest chair, eyes on the carpet. For her part, she couldn't get enough of the little flat. She wanted to soak up the atmosphere through the pores of her skin. "I suppose you're here on behalf of the landlord", she added in her "understanding" voice, masking her distaste for his jeans and tatty brown jersey, worn through at the elbows.

"I *am* the landlord", Keith said quietly, though it seemed to him as if he shouted out . . . the lie. Though legally, technically, it was true. He had been Roger's landlord—how Roger had detested the name Reginald, still more the diminutive. It set his teeth on edge to hear it on this woman's lips. Unemployed, Roger had been in no position to pay any rent, and in any case he'd done all the domestic work for them both.

"Oh, I see", she half-laughed in a little-girl, apologetic way that seemed to suggest that any misunderstanding was entirely on account of his not making things clearer . . . and she for her part washed her hands of the whole affair. . . . At the same time, he felt that—courtesy of the Abbey National—he'd grown a couple of inches in her eyes, and he despised her for values as meretricious as her heavy gold ring.

"Well, in that case, Mr Sperry. . . ." She paused; she still found him intrusive. He was noticing how, as a landlord, he had a name that could be remembered even when it had been heard only once in that traumatic phone call. Then he realised he was being unfair: had he been here "on behalf of the landlord", she would not have known his name. He reminded himself that inside that over-ripe plum trouser-suit at least twenty years too young for her and her blue hair, there was a person as vulnerable as himself—though he hoped he'd never cause the misery which she had, and which made it difficult for him fully to feel her vulnerability.

"Perhaps you'd leave us here for . . . a little quiet time. And we'll drop the key in on you later, if you give us the address." Practical woman that she was, she was already fishing out her silver propelling-pencil and *The Lady*'s diary from her black patent-leather handbag, characteristically clamped across her body like a shield.

He said, "I live here."

With her little half laugh, she went through her not-my-misunderstanding-but-your-confusion routine.

Out of a mercy which he did not feel—not that he'd

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felt anything since hearing about the accident, hugging the numbness to himself like a thick shawl, dreading to find himself naked with the reality of Roger's death—he parroted, "I'll be in the other room, if you want me."

She said, "We'll just spend a little while in here. And then in my son's room."

She meant, of course, their bedroom. So, he would wait in the box-room. On one level, he bitterly resented the Cayleys' presence in their home—his home now. If anyone as lifeless as Roger's father could be said to have a presence. On a deeper level, he couldn't care less. It was as irrelevant as her reiteration of "Reggie, Reggie". ("I had to keep the same initial", Roger had explained. "It was the only way I could get changing it past the teachers.") This woman had an image of a son. He'd had the man himself. And she'd come to claim her son's body, now that it was useless, rotting. Who cared? While there had been a breath of life in that body, he'd have fought off anyone who'd made Roger so unhappy as a child, but who cared about a handful of dust? She was welcome to her pickings. Roger would have been the last person to have cared what become of his body, once it was no longer him.

Even the ludicrous high-Anglican funeral that she'd informed him had been arranged for the life-long atheist Roger didn't matter. Just because there *was* nothing after death. It was disrespectful to his body to play their children's games with it, with men who liked dressing-up in black shirts and long white pinafores and beads in their hands instead of where they belonged, round their necks . . . but they couldn't hurt him now. It was finished.

He realised they'd been standing in silence for . . . how long? He reflected that she was the type for whom no machine, not even the most perfect, as yet uninvented robot, could be a substitute for servants with their reliable fallibility in need of reproof. Walking out of the sitting-room and across the passage into the tiny spare room, like an old-time servant's room, it struck him that it might seem rather odd that the tenant should have the "master bedroom", while the landlord squeezed himself into a box-room . . . which now, of course, seemed particularly coffin-like.

THE BREATH of perpetual peace, which the auburn-headed trees had seemed to whisper earlier, continued to elude the woman who, under another dispensation, could have been his detested mother-in-law. These ginger top-knots across the busy street of traffic didn't calm the storm in her head—or her heart, or wherever exactly it was located—at the unfairness of her loss. Indeed, the traffic brought it home to her all the more vividly as she wondered where exactly in this nice town the accident had happened? Not here, surely . . . under these trees, with their blackbird-bill orange and blood-red leaves? And then again, the ultimate image of peace for her was naturally their village church in Berkshire, inseparable in her mind's eye from the birch-fringed churchyard in which it was so picturesquely set. But the churchyard seemed a shade sinister now that it was to be the premature resting-place for poor dear Reggie.

The funeral itself was beginning to worry her. She felt it was only right that some of her son's friends should be there. But because she'd had so little to do with him for so long, she didn't actually know any of them. She'd put an advert—an announcement, she corrected herself mentally—in *The Daily Telegraph*. She wondered if his friends read *The Telegraph*? It was a question of keeping up appearances. Father Cadell was always one for making the best of whatever presented itself, but she was sure the new curate would expect a friend or two. And the neighbours! Though it was possible that her son might be seen as a lonely person who had only his loving family which always stood by him, through thick and thin, and that would be all right.

Still, perhaps she'd invite this landlord fellow along. No doubt his relations with Reggie had been fairly formal, given the landlord-tenant relationship, but all the same it was a small flat so they must have seen a bit of each other. He was horribly scruffy, but she supposed he could be wheeled on as a token friend. She said in the direction of Howard's lifeless form, "I'm thinking of inviting Sperry to the funeral."

The bowed head raised itself a few inches from contemplation of the maroon carpet or total unawareness of its surroundings, "Just as you like, my dear." A pause. "It would be a long way for him to go."

LIGHT YEARS away down the dark passage, sitting wretchedly on the narrow bed in the box-room, Keith dimly heard voices from another place, another time. In the suddenly strange surroundings, all that registered was that it was practically the first occasion since their arrival that Roger's father had opened his mouth. Had he been struck dumb by grief or was it merely the effect of God-knows-how-many decades of living with his wife?

Then he heard that lady's high heels tap-tapping into the bedroom. She sounded in his skull like Long John Silver tap-tapping toward the young Jim. His eyes filled with tears, but he didn't feel anything. It was possible, apparently, to have the physical attributes of emotion while remaining deep in shock. Like a child dressing-up in a curtain for a musketeer's cloak, he drew his numbness protectively round him, like Roger's arms in that other life, that sometime he would realise was finished.

"Mr Sperry", boomed from the passage. At her rich contralto, he brushed his hand across his eyes and staggered to his feet. He supposed that if he was a landlord so hard-up that he was obliged to rent out

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the only decent bedroom and himself hole up in this coffin-sized room, it might be understandable if he seemed a little distraught at his tenant's untimely death, beneath the wheels of an errant coal-merchant's lorry. Mrs Cayley might reasonably suppose that a week's rent would be lost before the tenant could be replaced.

"Mr Sperry", came her confident contralto again, the middle-class voice unchanging through generations; her mother would have been among those women who "gave her men", her sons, to the "Great" War and with a flick of a white feather tried to whip in a few others too, just for good measure.

He stood in the doorway of the box-room, feeling like Lazarus raised at his master's voice. Even in the merciful dimness of the passage, she was everything he most disliked in a woman. She reminded him of the Boadicea cartoons of Maggie Thatcher. Her upholstered breasts were even more protuberant beneath her tight jacket than an unkind Nature had ever intended.

"Oh, Mr Sperry!" He wondered what her ghastly smile could mask, as his masked his tears. "We wondered"—so the somnolent husband *was* capable of wondering—"if you'd like to come to my son's funeral? Friday, at four o'clock. You'd be most welcome." She made it sound as if she were inviting him to a tea-party.

"That's very kind of you." In turn, he sounded as if he were responding to an invitation to whatever social rites people like Mrs Cayley went in for these days—probably the old ones but he wouldn't know, his roots were different: they did things differently in the Yorkshire mining village where he had been born and brought up, not that he regarded that as home.

"I couldn't get the time off work." That was both true and not true. He doubted the head would give him time off for "a friend's" funeral—friends after all were two a penny, unlike mothers. Very likely, the head had a table about compassionate leave (perhaps modelled on the Table of Kindred and Affinity in the Book of Common Prayer to inform heterosexuals whom they might marry), stipulating the number of hours' absence allowable, corresponding to the degree of closeness: a deceased cousin in Edinburgh would pass muster but only a lost mother would justify time out in Cornwall. Of course, if Roger would have wanted him to be there he'd have pleaded sickness—no need to pretend to be quite at death's door to get to his lover's funeral. But, as it happened, this week was the half-term holiday, which was why he was at home now.

Half-sensing he'd not said enough to acknowledge her gesture of an invitation to the funeral, he reiterated, "I simply couldn't get time off to travel to England and . . ." couldn't stomach the antics of her friends, the black- and white-frocked Anglo-Catholic priests, not even man enough to be Roman Catholic, perhaps because they baulked at celibacy; there was nothing like having your wafer-thin cake and eating it.

Perhaps a shade subdued, she declared "Well, I'll sort out my son's things and then we'll have to think about getting home. My husband doesn't like driving after dark, so I dare say we shan't get very far tonight." Perhaps she felt relieved at his refusal, as when Mrs Filbert declined her bridge invitation, though there again it was ultimately a question of making up the numbers. Had she known him a little better, of course, she could have offered to lend him one of her husband's dark suits to attend her only child's funeral.

DIMLY WONDERING what exactly she meant by "my son's things" and facing down the thought that she was angling for an invitation to stay overnight (she'd not, after all, invited him to stay with them for the funeral), he politely ran through the names of some of Perth's most prestigious hotels, winding up, "There's always Gleneagles", though he judged it out of even her range. "Out in lovely countryside. You'd see the autumn tints", he added pleasantly.

"Well, we'll see what time it is when we're ready. Ah, there you are, darling", she added to her husband, who was ambling through from the landing with a couple of expensive-looking matching tan suitcases, obviously empty, grasped in one hand. Keith realised now what she'd meant by "my son's things". Roger would certainly have wanted his clothes to go to the Oxfam shop, just as he'd have wanted his body to be cremated. But, without a will. . . . It was ironic that his impatience with all their conventions had left him so vulnerable to them finally . . . when it no longer mattered. Their victory was a hollow mockery.

"Everything in that room's Reggie's?", she queried conscientiously. Through the cotton-wool of his enduring shock, he didn't think he detected any undertone.

"Yes", he lied indifferently. He could scarcely think what was in their bedroom except, of course, all his clothes as well as Roger's. He glanced round at the box-room he'd claimed to live in. The bed was made up from whomever had last stayed with them. Two raincoats hung in the cupboard where they were always kept, since that left more space in the shared bedroom wardrobe. And on Sunday evening, after phoning the Cayleys, he'd dumped on the top shelf a couple of his shirts from the airing cupboard where Roger had placed them—out of the same instinct that had made him slip Roger's few letters from Cyril, which he'd never made any secret that he still kept, into his wallet.

He hated thinking of Sunday evening. The rabbity young policeman had brought the news of the accident and he'd methodically made a list of things to do, finally turning up Roger's parents' address and telephoning them to learn that they would "arrive" on Tuesday, now that there was no one to arrive for who would show any independence of mind, any will of his

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own, any spark of being an autonomous human being. "Their" boy had been restored to never-never land, and could be trusted to show no sign of life.

THERE HAD never been any question of telling either of their sets of parents. In the last couple of years, as the '70s drew to an end, several of their friends had come out into warm or at least civilised relationships with their families. But as Roger had said, "Why should I give them one more stick to beat me with?" He'd felt the same. Their backgrounds were different, but the scenario was the same: their parents had never accepted them as autonomous human beings. His parents used to make out that it was through grammar school and university that he'd grown away from their Yorkshire mining existence. He knew he'd have got away from *them* somehow, even if he'd only moved to another pit. Even as a schoolboy, he'd put Aberdeen at the top of his list of university choices because it was the furthest geographically from his parents. Recently, though, he'd wondered wryly whether it hadn't been his parents' prejudices that put him off the south, notwithstanding that two years ago, when their number came up on the Premium Bonds, they'd emigrated to Devon. He reflected that had Roger been his wife, they'd be here now, comforting him for his loss; and he felt he should be thankful for that small mercy at least.

He wondered what Roger's parents were poking their noses into? The flat seemed suspiciously quiet. The father had probably subsided into lethargy again, sitting staring at the pattern in the carpet, as he himself was doing at the plain maroon. He supposed Cayley's appalling wife had sapped his will, back in the mists of their matrimonial early days. He felt he should go and see what she was getting up to, never mind if it was her "little quiet time".

With a kind of apology of a knock, he put his head round the bedroom door. At once, he felt more angry than if the room had been raped by burglars, with clothes trodden into the carpet. Both Cayleys, with one suitcase each on either side of the big double bed, were neatly stowing Roger's and his shirts and underpants away. The domesticity of the scene appalled him. It was obscene. They could have been calmly sorting through the week's laundry. Her white slug fingers smoothed and patted a pile of underpants in the suitcase as if they were baby clothes. The suitcase was both womb and tomb.

He allowed himself to say, evenly, "I think he'd have liked Oxfam to have the clothes." He couldn't say "Roger". He couldn't say "Reggie".

"Oh, we have our jumble sales, you know." She smiled brightly across the bed.

He wondered for what ludicrously inappropriate cause their clothes would be sold—Church Missionary Society? local Conservative Association? Mothers' Union? He could hardly afford to lose his entire wardrobe and be left with two raincoats, two shirts and what he was wearing; but now that he'd have to kit himself out again at the Perth Oxfam shop it would at least make up to them for the loss of Roger's things. Swings and roundabouts. He tried to tell himself that the Cayleys were only irrelevant ghosts.

"I've got to go out now. Slam the door behind you when you go, please—don't worry about the mortice lock."

She felt surprised and annoyed. Though earlier she'd wanted to be left alone in the flat, that didn't seem very important now. Already, the deepening afternoon light was heavy with the shadow of departure. She was beginning to feel the same disappointment as when, on his increasingly rare visits, it had become clear that the focus of interest for Reggie was some phone call or letter, or even visiting someone or other in the village whom he'd never previously much liked. She remembered bitterly how he'd spent an evening with the Andersons, of all people, on his last visit. She felt too deflated to say anything to Sperry except a sulky "Goodbye".

He wondered if he should say something more. Then he thought: let the dead bury their dead, and with a nod in the direction of Mr Cayley, whose watery blue eyes seemed for the first time to be focusing directly on him, he went out of the room. Snatching up one of the two raincoats, he didn't know where he was going. One of his friends would be in. Someone would put a cup of tea or a glass of whisky in his hand. There would be a dustbin where—before giving in to the temptation to read them—he could tear up Cyril's letters to Roger, without fear of white slug fingers torturing love into the pattern of a jigsaw puzzle with which they might once have played with their only child. And there would be a phone on which he could ring round local solicitors to get an appointment to make his will at four o'clock on Friday—Roger would have appreciated the timing.

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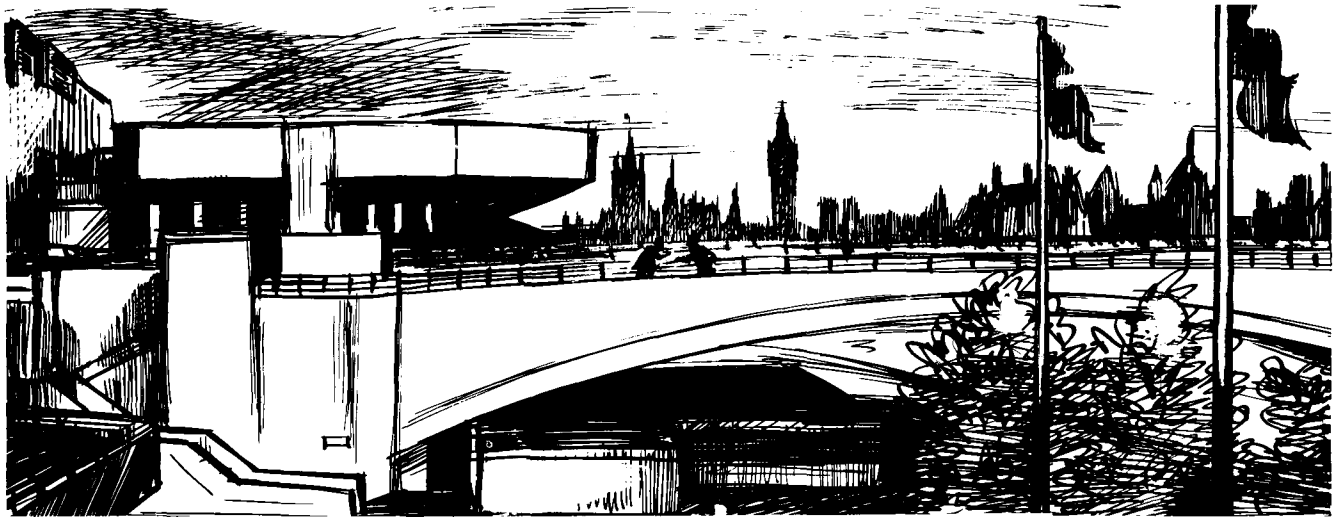
Brian Moeran

Waiting for Culture on the South Bank

(With Apologies to Samuel Beckett)



How time flies when one has fun! As a child of seven, I, too, visited the Festival of Britain. It was held, I recall, on the newly developed south bank of the River Thames, between the bridges of Charing Cross and Waterloo. Accompanied there by a young Fleet Air Arm officer, who used to lodge in our flat near the Edgware Road Underground station, but who not too long after was killed in a flying accident, I have a vague recollection of transmitting some new form of telecommunication to a distant country like Australia (whose improbable remoteness was only brought into focus by the arrival of a baggy-capped cricket team which spent most of an English summer struggling to retain or regain some ashes). At any rate, for some time thereafter, I had in my possession a long piece of ribbon-like white tape, punctuated with small holes whose diagrammatic form faithfully recorded, I was informed, the message that had been sent "down under".

I never did manage to decipher that telecommunicated message—perhaps just as well, since I am not certain that I knew anybody in Australia at that time—and some years later the paper tape itself disappeared—lost during the course of our move to a *real* house in what seemed like the depths of the country, but which turned out to be a part of London's outer suburbs. Other souvenirs from that day's outing to the Festival of Britain, however, remain still in my possession: a newly minted five shilling coin, which enabled me for the first time to make sense of the English "half crown"; and a red twopenny-ha'penny stamp on a brown envelope addressed to my father at his restaurant, The Green Lizard, strategically situated across the street from John Lewis's department store near Oxford Circus.

A whole world emerges from that envelope—a world of apple juice and meringue glacés; of something called "Welsh rabbit" that was not spelt that way; of creamy cakes and richly filled chocolates which once a year found their way into the most superbly decorated Easter eggs that my father proudly made for—among others—various members of the royal family. This world used then to be crammed into brown bread sandwiches which, together with a bottle of diluted orange squash, filled a wartime knapsack and kept the wolf from hunger's door as I passed whole days on grimy station platforms, noting down the numbers of glowingly painted and brass-plated engines that steamed in and out of the capital's termini.

This world contrasted, then, with that of those from whom I learned how to trespass on the engine yards, and with whom on occasion I shared my Green Lizard sandwiches. There is, indeed, an unpleasant side to *memoria praeteritorum bonorum,* for I soon discovered that not all those who lived in England spoke with the same condescending tone in which I had been trained to voice my words, and that "class" was a word that was used of more than just

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various categories of steam engine in the pages of Allen's *Western Region Locomotives*. As a result, I hastily developed what might be called a "chameleon" approach to speech, adjusting my pronunciation to that of my conversant, so that even today my children can tell whether I am speaking on the telephone to an Irish builder, Californian native, West Country potter, or Indian academic colleague. Clearly, like Pozzo, I don't like talking in a vacuum!

The Festival of Britain has left its cultural mark. That area first encountered as a child has, in the intervening years, sprouted concert halls, theatres, film theatres, an art gallery and, more recently, a museum of the moving image. Overlooking "Father" Thames, this cultural complex measures with the ebb and flow of the river's tides another father, time, whose dates are indeed inscribed on the landscape.

On the north bank opposite, rears Cleopatra's Needle—phallic symbol of an empire, of which the Festival of Britain was no doubt conceived to remind a nation's emasculated, war-scarred populace. Arrayed behind this obelisk (*where it falls, mandrakes grow*) along the majestic, tidal sweep of power and excess, stands the Holy Trinity of Church, Government and Royalty: Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament, Whitehall's ministries, Somerset House, and King's College. Meanwhile, on the south bank's upstart shore is found the new Britain of tradition and modernity: to one side of the cultural complex, the vast edifice of the former Greater London Council's offices; behind it, an equally impressive mass, the headquarters of Shell Oil; and beyond Waterloo Bridge itself, Thames Television studios. Thus, the site of the Festival of Britain is surrounded by organs of government, the media and business—all of which participate in the creation, advertising, and sponsorship of Culture plc.

Enough of landscapes! Let us talk about the worms. There is one thing about Culture (still with that capital C) that should be noted here. It must be distant to be properly appreciated. You cannot live close to culture and enjoy it. Or, as Estragon retorted, there is nothing to recognise when all your lousy life you've been crawling about in the mud. Rather, your home should be situated far away, and you should have to travel many miles in order to participate in culture's rituals. This explains why the South Bank complex is within easy reach of two major railway and three underground stations, why it also has its own Festival Pier. It explains, too, the arrival of "the down-and-outs".

"SPARE ANY CHANGE for a cuppa tea, mista?" He usually stands on Waterloo Bridge, accosting the pedestrians who cross the river on their way between the station and their place of work. *Charming spot. Inspiring prospects.* Hands deep in trouser pockets, he stares for the most part into space. It is a question of temperament, of character. He knows that it is no use struggling, for he is what he is and the essential doesn't change. *That's how it is on this bitch of an earth.* On some days, when the wind is particularly piercing and he feels the cold more keenly, or simply because he feels so inclined, he will give the upper part of his body a violent shake, accompanying it with a furious, antagonistic roar. The fact that, by this strange mannerism, he may well scare away someone sympathetic to his plight doesn't seem to bother him at all. Is it that we are, indeed, all born mad and that some remain so?

Yet as "plight" it is perceived by those of us who run the gauntlet twice a day along the pavement that leads across the bridge and takes us down a slope under the perpetually throbbing roundabout of buses, tourist coaches, taxis, cars, trucks, motorbikes, and thence through a paint-daubed subway to Waterloo Station. Tucked away in these windy corners under the bridge itself, as well as behind the columns that sustain the Queen Elizabeth Hall, edifices have sprung up to add a third profile to the Janus-banked Thames. *In another compartment, there's no lack of void.* Here is a new city of cardboard boxes and Salvation Army blankets, in whose windowless cubicles have settled the "homeless", "loonies", "tramps", "unemployed", and "down-and-outs".

The epithets may vary with the state of our tortured consciences. "Give us a penny for a cuppa tea, mista"—*to all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears.* And what if I were to open up the modern descendant of my train-spotting satchel and offer him—or another—the remains of my thermos of tea? Is this what he wants? Or would he prefer cash with which to buy himself some of the alcohol advertised along the roadside? "Vladi Good Vodka, Vladimir!"

Such doubts are hardly worthy of the equation that links those of us who pace to and from our work with all mankind. Occasionally, therefore, one resolves to represent worthily the foul brood to which cruel fate has consigned us, and to extend a helping hand. The trouble is that on these rare days when resolution conquers, I am approached neither by the man on the bridge with his antagonistic roar, nor by any of his apparent companions gathered under the roundabout. My tea remains undrunk, and I am left to toss a coin into the cardboard box, on whose lid is scrawled: "Please give to the homeless." All I can remark is that I might easily have been in this category myself. *If chance had not willed otherwise. To each one his due.*

IS THERE ANYTHING we can do to relieve these dead voices of their noise like wings, like leaves, like sand, like leaves? After all, it is not as if we can anticipate some tangible return. When we give anything at all, it is the bones of our wealth. Some, perhaps, may talk to them about a recent hiking tour in the Pyrenees, explain the twilight (if it is in their nature to be liberal), become—on the basis of two brief conversations—old friends. But once the blathering about nothing in particular is over, they'll be alone once more, in the midst of a nothingness that obliges one woman to sing songs into the cardboard tube of a used-up lavatory roll and another—in blue-visored motorcycle helmet, men's brogues, with a gold cross on a chain around her blackened neck—to find the nearest lamp post and, lifting up her skirts, there crouch down to pee. A dog's life—hideous, perhaps, but neither more nor less so than usual.

The acrid stench of urine brings out the spotted breast-pocket handkerchiefs and disapproving looks of passers-by. No *She would have burst* or *Oh! Oh well then of course in*

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that case. . . . It is more a matter of deciding whether she has "stooped" to the "depths" of some form of depravity, or "raised" herself to the "height" of unconcern. But if it is a scandal, we too should ask if we are alluding to anything in particular.

Our liberal nature, then, obliges us to decide whether a foul-smelling, lank-haired man in rags really is "homeless", or whether alms are an excuse for the kind of drunken frolics—an exchange of hats, or the examination of laceless boots—that we on occasion witness during the course of our pedestrian travels. (Some, no doubt, would echo Pozzo's words: *The road is free to all. . . . It's a disgrace. But there you are.*) One young man, for example, rants and raves at a fellow drunk—an old, bearded tramp who remains unmoved by, oblivious of, the other's attempts to uproot physically a sapling (no tree for hanging, this) planted in the middle of the circular bench on which he is sitting. A woman with bloated stomach remonstrates unsuccessfully. *The tears of the world are a constant quantity.* It is hard to tell whether she is trying to protect the older man (who, given his state of impervious bliss, does not look as if he needs protection), or persuade the younger that beauty, grace, and truth of the first water are not, after all, beyond him.

DAILY WE WALK in and out of scenes such as these. Enough to make us laugh, if it weren't prohibited—autostops in the theatre of life which later fuel the imagination (assuming that we have such). It is Gogo and Didi acting out their private nightmares. With the help of a supernumerary. Godot, when she actually came, turned out to be a woman after all! The white beard was in fact her peroxide hair. The young man has finally, and quite unexpectedly, discovered his father sitting on this concrete bench. Godot is his wife—whose wife?—and wants them both to go back home—what home? Such thoughts! Such banality! (But then *what is terrible is to have thought.*) My last glimpse of the trio is of the younger man holding his hands out imploringly, trying to catch the older man's distracted gaze that is rooted to his kneecaps. His muteness is the very voice of Estragon's despair—*Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!*

Screams in the silence that make one pale for weariness. It is a relief, then, to leave behind the stench inscribed in magic ink on the grey concrete ("Sean pissed. We won't forget the smell of your urine."), and head out on to the Queen's Walk. Here *the fresh air stimulates the jaded appetite.* It is almost as if the down-and-outs do not exist. These cultural drop-outs are, however, invited by a wooden sign to "drop in and see Hallett's Panorama (Britain's largest painting) in the Jubilee Gardens". Further invitations to rejoin the nation's Culture come from the South Bank Crafts Centre, the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the Hayward Gallery, the National Film Theatre—each clearly marked according to a curious colour code that makes stage-acting red, film-acting orange, painting blue, and classical music purple or yellow. The list, like Lucky's tirade, goes on and on. *Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of. . . .*

But Puncher and Wattman may, after all, be found among the second-hand books, laid out on trestle tables under Waterloo Bridge, to protect them from the rain. (This much the down-and-outs share with the printed word: neither is impermeable.) Here on Sundays the atmosphere is almost festive—a woodcarver carves wood, buskers busk, a caricaturist draws his caricatures for those of us who can afford to laugh at our predicament. And since we, too, cannot go on without the society of our likes, even when the likeness is an imperfect one, we board a pleasure-cruiser where we wine and dine (*touch of autumn in the air this evening*), gazing at the cinematic view of London's tidal riverside, and reminiscing perhaps on Glyndebourne, Salzburg, Cannes, the Louvre, the Macon country, trying to forget that others puke their lives away underneath the Crackon concrete that buttresses the music, film, in short the art, of which our lives are—we like to assure ourselves—made.

This air of "culture exotique" is lit by red-and-white-bulbed lights, strung between imitation gas-lamps atop tall black iron posts, that are themselves wreathed on high with laurels and on low with fish. Here is the marker of my youthful home, a second-floor flat in Hyde Park Mansions, above "the second lamp-post on the left" (final instructions to a London cabby), but the inscription *EIIR* is enough to remind me also that the Festival of Britain was held during the reign of King George VI, and that his daughter's coronation provided me with the first opportunity ever to lay eyes on a television set.

THUS DOES CULTURE sire our cultured memories! *We always find something to give us the impression we exist,* whether we be black youths roller-skating along Jubilee Walk, two drunks smashing bottles in the underground car park, or a young blonde-haired girl practising pirouettes in ballet shoes and an absurdly frilly pink dress. For culture to make sense, it must contain more than the Scapegoat's Agony or the Hard Stool. Rather, it must be entangled in the net of its specific context. That the context of the South Bank signifies the chance of a series of cultural reversals is what unsettles those who prefer not to peel away the onion of society.

The idea of reversal is, of course, patently clear in the juxtaposition on a vertical axis of a "high culture" for the educated and the "non-culture" of the down-and-outs. This reversal is not just spatial, but temporal as well. After all, the daylight hours are given to the down-and-outs, who do not work and thereby are at liberty to roam around the concrete edifices of a culture that for the most part comes into its own in the evening. No wonder Vladimir and Estragon found themselves waiting for Godot when the day was nearing the end of its repertory. It is in these twilight hours of stipulated leisure that actors and musicians—including the scraggly individual with his penny whistle, and the clean-cut man with clarinet and spectacles—perform.

There is, however, a difference in these performances. Whereas the actors in the National Theatre or concert musicians in the Royal Festival Hall play for their audiences, the down-and-outs play only for themselves. The penny-whistler does not care about the fact that he repeats a single tune of seven notes throughout the evening, nor the pavement artist

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that, in kneeling with his back to the monotonous subway wall, he draws brightly coloured portraits, land- and seascapes (the contrast is both in subject matter and in use of hues) that can only be looked at by others upside down. True, the nature of the audience is different. The one is present by its own volition (and ability to pay), and may intermittently repeat its appearances, depending on the quality of the performance witnessed; the other finds itself present by mistake, an ephemeral intruder so to speak; there one moment, gone the next.

In each case, however, it is the context that defines the cultural content. Take the bearded man who draws with crayons on the pavement and place him, with different materials, in a studio, and you have the makings of an "artist". Remove the dinner-suited man with wildly flailing arms from the conductor's podium in one of the nearby concert halls and stand him instead on Waterloo Bridge, and he would soon be arrested as a lunatic or, at the least, for disturbing the peace. Although the radiant princess playing Bach's partitas on her violin may, like Cinderella, be transformed from the stroke of midnight into a servant girl sawing Irish jigs on her fiddle (the coach turned into a pumpkin), there is no reason why the golden slipper should not be found to fit her stinking foot; why entertainment, in short, should not be seen as art. It is merely a matter of being blessed with the presence of a fairy godmother.

THE POINT ABOUT culture is its uselessness. In some respects, perhaps, there is not that much difference between an unkempt woman trumpeting into a small cardboard tube and a powdered lady singing arias or delivering Shakespearean monologues. But Mozart and Shakespeare—or any other playwright, composer, or even essayist—are splendidly useless: so much so that they must be justified by "critics" (that final abuse, so relished by Gogo). Such uselessness, of course, is closely connected with a culture which makes much of the function of work. Preferably, those who actively participate in Culture do not produce it themselves, and are only indirectly concerned in production as a whole.

In this respect, the down-and-outs share something in common with those who frequent the halls of culture above their cardboard shanty town. They do not work; they do not make any contribution towards the capitalist mode of production. At the same time, however, they do not participate in consumption, the corollary of work. Unlike their counterparts, whose social status is gauged by the extent to which they are prepared to consume conspicuously (thereby adhering, consciously or otherwise, to Veblen's argument), the down-and-outs understand by consumption no more than a physical disease.

The great cold on sea on land and in the air I resume for reasons unknown in spite of the . . . . Culture is, of course, composed of media, and media of one sort or another dominate the South Bank complex. Not surprisingly, then, they make the down-and-outs a part of Culture, into culture. Television camera crews with all their up-to-date paraphernalia light up the twilight vaults, cast unreal shadows across men and women dossing down for the night. *They give birth astride a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more.* I, too, record in words their existence. Thus do we capture them and make them safe. *Habit is a great deadener.* It is a relief to discover that some of those we pass on our daily route—the young couple with a dog, for example—make thirty pounds or more an hour begging their way round the streets of London. We don't have to give, after all. *Gonococcus! Spirochaete!*

And what happens to the down-and-outs over Christmas, that ritual potlatch when all vie through giving for more prestige? Not much, would seem to be the answer. Oh yes, a few extra blankets are distributed by those who perform the role of the Hudson Bay Company here on the South Bank. And a few extra bowls of hot soup, no doubt. But the world is deathly quiet. An illuminated sign flashes at two-second intervals: HAPPY XMAS . . . FROM THE NATIONAL THEATRE. Pasted to concrete walls are posters for past media events: Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, *Heartburn* (Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson), *Extremities* (Farrah Fawcett), *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Vamp: A Frightening Comedy*, and even *Waiting for Godot* itself.

There is also a statue entitled *London Pride*, commissioned for the Festival of Britain and sculpted by Frank Dobson, CBE, RA. It is of two women, one clasping an empty bowl, the other with two hands on the calf of one crossed leg. In both their nakedness and their posture, they repeat the gestures of the down-and-outs who stare into space with their begging bowls. Engraved at their feet are the words:

> "Given by Mary Dobson 1987 and placed on the South Bank. Assisted generously by Lynton Property and Reversionary plc and the Henry Moore Foundation. Arts Council of Great Britain."

I pinch and squeeze the women's nipples. They are hard, one lumpy, and very cold.

A silver glitter tree has been erected at one end of the shacks lined neatly in a row under the Queen Elizabeth Hall (their tidiness is another way by which these cardboard boxes become less threatening). Above it, in spindly calligraphy, a message to myself and the only others there—three youths in short-sleeved T-shirts (they can afford to be this much undressed) who practice their skateboarding on the concrete slopes and paving stones nearby, their cries of encouragement and congratulation echoing harshly in the silence of the down-and-outs' snores: "Happy Christmas everyone. May God bless *us*."

> VLADIMIR: *It's the start that's difficult.*
> ESTRAGON: *You can start from anything.*
> VLADIMIR: *Yes, but you have to decide.*

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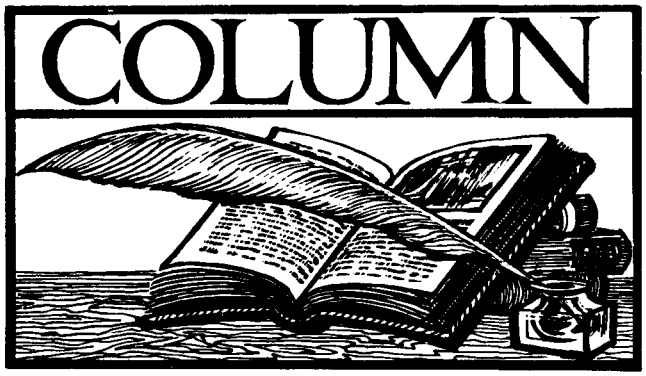

"EVEN GOD", said the poet Agathon, "cannot change the past." Living in Periclean Athens, he may never have read revisionist historians. Quite a few of them have blithely outdone the Almighty, alleging that the secret ballot "privatised the vote", that Adolf Hitler was a normal politician, or that the United States initiated the Cold War. Fortunately, an inverted Gresham's Law eventually ensures that good history drives out bad.

All history, in fact, is reinterpretation. No historian can tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—partly because "truth" is an elusive concept, partly because words distort reality, and partly for mundane reasons like ignorance, lying or forgetful witnesses, and archives still closed under the 30-year rule. So it's always useful when anniversaries prod publishers to commission new books on old subjects, reappraising what most people take for granted. Recent examples have included Domesday, the American, French, and "Glorious" Revolutions, and most especially World War II.

This last has been by far the most prolific. Never in the field of human conflict was so much written by so many—to be read, perhaps, by so few. The coffee-tables are groaning. Some day, their owners tell themselves, they'll find the time to master these massive volumes, lined up already as erudite Christmas gifts. Nine of them, at present, tower over my typewriter. Read on for a concise Consumer Report.

On a crass pence-per-page evaluation, the clear winner is *Total War*, by Peter Calvocoressi, Guy Wint, and John Pritchard.[1] This, in a revised second edition, offers 1,315 pages for £25.00, or 1.9 pence a page. It also has 80 maps and 160 illustrations, many of the latter unbearably poignant: devastation and ruins, but also pogroms and summary executions. The book's first edition was published in 1972, before *Ultra* was publicly revealed and discussed; and the narrative is now greatly enhanced by knowledge of how the decrypters at Bletchley Park broke the Nazis' *Enigma* ciphers. The opening of some of the archives has also revealed that fear of Japan was a factor in pre-War appeasement of Hitler; while John Pritchard's revision of the late Guy Wint's account of war in Asia and the Pacific explains much more about Japanese behaviour, although in no sense excusing it.

In other respects, *Total War* retains its original structure as essentially two books in one. The first, marginally shorter, covers the War in Europe; the second is devoted to the East: each still has a separate index. As a diplomatic-cum-military account of the conflict, the narrative is hard to better. Its main area of weakness is what used to be called "the Home Front". But it scores on my own private thumbnail test by mentioning both Jean Monnet and Jean Moulin.

Monnet but not Moulin is named (and little more) in the runner-up for the pence-per-page trophy, Robert Leckie's *Delivered from Evil*.[2] At £19.95 for 998 pages, its hardback edition costs just 1.998 pence a page, with 21 maps and no illustrations.

As its title implies, this book addresses the layman: but its author has a practised pen, and his fluent professional account, packed with anecdotes and apt quotations, reads as well as the best American higher journalism. It weaves together the European and Eastern halves of the story, and so reflects more naturally the actual experience of living through the War—a weakness as well as a virtue, since it tends to accept the perspectives of the time. Every so often, Leckie interrupts his narrative to give crisp and vivid profiles of famous protagonists in the struggle: yet his selection is very much that which participants might have made. Mussolini, Hitler, Roosevelt, Stalin; Churchill, de Gaulle, Rommel, Tojo; MacArthur, Eisenhower, Montgomery, Halsey, Tito: most of the pantheon are familiar. Is there no similar place for other key figures like Marshall, Pétain, Himmler, or Harry Truman? Still, if you want an exciting story, this may well be your book.

Martin Gilbert's *Second World War* goes even further in the direction of straight chronology.[3] With 846 pages priced at £18.95 (2.2 pence a page), this comes third in the pence-per-page stakes. More than most of the batch, it gives a sense of the hurly-burly of war, shot through all the time with its atrocity. The author's mammoth work on Churchill, and his study of the Holocaust, clearly contribute to the density of his text; and 102 maps, plus 130 photographs, add still more to its tale of suffering and effort. Jean Moulin figures, but not Monnet; and the pulse that throbs most tangibly, from the invasion of Poland to the discovery of the death camps, is the tragedy of Europe's Gipsies and Jews.

There is a sense, however, in which Gilbert's narrative at times risks turning into one-damned-thing-after-another. Day follows day as in a newspaper file or card index, leaving the reader to act as his or her own Joint Chiefs of Staff, plotting and evaluating the overall battle picture. This is indeed telling it as it was: but by the end, having supped full of horrors, one craves rather more than an epilogue, looking for fuller analysis of geopolitics and even national psychology. In that respect, this might be described as a *biography* of the War.

Next in order of pages-for-money comes John Terraine's *Business in Great Waters* at £19.50 for 840 pages, or 2.3 pence a page.[4] This is not a general war history, but an

[1] *Total War: The Causes and Courses of the Second World War*. By PETER CALVOCORESSI, GUY WINT, and JOHN PRITCHARD. Viking, £25.00.

[2] *Delivered from Evil: The Saga of World War II*. By ROBERT LECKIE. Harper & Row, £19.95, paper £9.95.

[3] *Second World War*. By MARTIN GILBERT. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £18.95.

[4] *Business in Great Waters: The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945*. By JOHN TERRAINE. Leo Cooper, £19.50.

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account of "The U-Boat Wars 1916-1945"—and it shows what a close-run thing they were. Like Calvocoressi's second edition, it can reveal the role of *Ultra* in World War II, and both quotes and endorses Professor Jürgen Rohwer's verdict that "There were many factors which influenced the outcome of the decisive Battle of the Atlantic we experienced. I would put 'Ultra' at the top of this list of factors." Where Terraine scores, however, is in his longer time-span, enabling him to show the importance of "Y Service" intercepts already in World War I. With 19 maps, 58 illustrations, 7 appendices, and 6 varieties of index, the book is dauntingly well-documented—an ideal present for a technically-minded former Naval officer, if you have one in mind.

BUT WHAT would you give to an inquisitive sixth-former—the kind whose school "projects" have involved tape-recording your own memories or thoughts of the War? The answer, at just three pence per page, comes fifth on the list: *The World at Arms* (£16.95 for 479 pages, each bearing at least one illustration or map).[5] Its editor is Michael Wright; and, being a Reader's Digest publication, it has a host of contributors and consultants. It makes no claims to research status: but as clear and striking exposition it will give the "feel" of the War to those too young to have known it, much as a visit to the Imperial War Museum might do. Essentially, this is the War as part-work—the kind of illustrated chronicle that could almost have been produced at the time. Typically, it mentions Moulin but not Monnet. Even the layout looks oddly old-fashioned; and the gold-blocked title on the front cover is deliberately pitted to look war-worn, as a slip-in note (to potentially disgruntled purchasers) explains. Even veterans, I suspect, will find this the volume they most frequently leaf through, refreshing memories and filling in factual gaps.

Professional historians sometimes scorn such productions, just as they sniff at TV. Not all of them can write so absorbingly on their more sober subjects: but one exception is Donald Cameron Watt. *How War Came*[6] is the title of his contribution to the current literary *Blitzkrieg*; and to a casual glance it might look like all overture and no opera. In reality, it's fascinating. The "hook" to catch the casual reader is its opening account of the Lüneburg Heath surrender, followed by a masterly panoptic survey of the way that War had laid Europe waste. Then, with the aid of immense archive resources, Donald Watt painstakingly investigates the reality of "appeasement", which in fact could be regarded as "failed deterrence". "Hitler willed, wanted, craved war and the destruction wrought by war. He did not want the war he got."

With 71 photographs, many cartoons and maps, two mentions of Jean Monnet, and 736 pages for £25.00, this works out at 3.39 pence per page. But of all the books considered here, it makes the most original general contribution to understanding World War II—in so far as the greatest mystery is how that catastrophe came about.

SIX DOWN, and three to go. H. P. Willmott is a lecturer at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst; and his book, *The Great Crusade*, is probably the one to give to a military professional keen on war games.[7] Priced at £17.95 for 500 pages, with 29 maps and 35 illustrations, this works out at 3.59 pence per page; but despite its title, reminiscent of Eisenhower's war memoirs, it avoids facile moralising. And although its main thrust is on battle strategy and tactics, it includes politics, economics, and "the Home Front"—arguing in particular that wars are won by systems as well as brain and sinews. Its only weakness is its subfusc prose. "Impressive though these achievements were, they nevertheless had certain implications"—a sentence picked at random from the Tunisian campaign. And from the Preface, any book's shop window: "The decision to accept the invitation to write this history was made on two grounds." Why not "I agreed to write this history for two reasons"?

Correlli Barnett has never been one to blunt his stylistic weapons—so much so that he has won enemies in high-ranking places. His Introduction to *Hitler's Generals*[8] concludes:

> "If the historian may pronounce a judgment on the German generals of the Hitler era, it is that professionalism is not enough; technical brilliance is not enough; obedience to an oath and to orders is not enough. What their traditions, upbringing and training had failed to give Hitler's generals was a wider sense of political and social responsibility; a belief that to obey their own consciences constituted the highest duty of all."

The exceptions, of course, were the July 1944 "bomb plot" conspirators, Speidel, Stülpnagel, and Witzleben—though 1944 was already late in the day. Not all Correlli Barnett's contributors write with his trenchancy: but their studies of 26 generals, each with a portrait photograph, make a good companion-piece to H. P. Willmott's book as a present to a military friend. At £20.00 for 497 pages, its unit cost is 4.02 pence per page.

Cheapest of all the present volumes, but with the highest unit cost of all, is Paul Fussell's *Wartime*, at £15.00 for 330 pages, or 4.54 pence per page.[9] But then this is a horse of quite another colour—not a war history, not a war memoir, but a wonderful tunnelling journey through the psychology of wartime, by a literary scholar who served as a subaltern (and was wounded) in the later days of World War II. His dazzling picture of the War includes its ribaldry, its boredom, its terror, and its ghastliness: few illustrations are needed to match this bleak gaze. As the title of his last chapter puts it, "The Real War Will Never Get in the Books".

What is so hard in fact, years later, is to recapture the magnitude of the War. Historians can trade statistics. How

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[5] *The World at Arms: The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of World War II*. Edited by MICHAEL WRIGHT. Reader's Digest Association, £16.95.

[6] *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of the Second World War, 1938-1939*. By DONALD CAMERON WATT. Heinemann, £25.00.

[7] *The Great Crusade: A New Complete History of the Second World War*. By H. P. WILLMOTT. Michael Joseph, £17.95.

[8] *Hitler's Generals*. Edited by CORRELLI BARNETT. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £20.00.

[9] *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*. By PAUL FUSSELL. Oxford University Press, £15.00.

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many people were killed in World War II? Donald Cameron Watt's figures for Europe add up to 18.5 million. Martin Gilbert's, for the whole war, total 49.57 million. This approximates to the round figure of 50 million offered by both Calvocoressi and Leckie; whereas Willmott makes it 57 million, and the Reader's Digest volume, with acknowledged omissions, adds it up to 64.071 million. On any calculation, it was as if the War had destroyed the entire population of either Britain or France.

But figures as such can seem meaningless. More telling are the tales of brutality: pedantic, systematic mass extermination; the camps, the starvation, the gas ovens, the mass graves; the wanton shooting of prisoners; the revenge killings at the Liberation; the general acceptance of death. One chilling photograph in Calvocoressi's book shows three normal, cheerful, nondescript Frenchmen and a woman in an overall, grinning at their American liberators. At their feet, ignored like so much rubbish, is the sprawling body of a German soldier that one of the Frenchmen has just killed.

It's difficult for those brought up in peacetime to find such scenes natural. Quite properly, hindsight questions both the efficacy and the ethics of, say, area bombing. Longing for symmetry of guilt, some historians equate Hiroshima with Auschwitz or Dresden with Dachau—as if there had been some bloodless, clinical, clean-handed way of winning the War. Veterans with long, unreconstructed memories may well retort that morality is a peacetime luxury: all's fair in love, but nothing's fair in war.

I personally remember things that now surprise and shame me. Going to bed in the London Blitz and wondering, mildly, academically, whether I'd ever wake up. Hearing of the 1,000-bomber raids on Germany, and exulting. Screaming war-cries at full tilt in bayonet practice, learning to stab and withdraw *with a twisting motion* to inflict maximum damage. Rehearsing unarmed combat, to break noses and eardrums, and *not to grab the little finger*, because you would lose control when it snapped off. Being taught how to throttle a sentry, preferably with cheesewire, from behind.

That, for a whole generation, was normality. It's a wonder that more of us didn't become psychopathic killers. One reason was growing disgust: but although we repudiated violence, and some of us worked actively for peaceful causes like the European Community, the experience of war was the psychological bottom line, the standard by which, in the last resort, everything else was judged. Would you trust So-and-so as a recruit to a Resistance circuit? That, or something like it, was many people's final criterion for a friend.

We were also hugely optimistic. No one, in what were called "the darkest days" of 1940, ever imagined that we in Britain could be defeated. Lack of imagination? Stupidity? Ignorance? Idiotic pride? I don't know what it was: but I suspect that it was an unconscious Pascalian bet. It wouldn't *help* to believe in defeat: the only chance of victory was to have faith in it. Few people, I suspect, rehearsed the argument: they were too busy. We took it for granted. And we carried on.

Today, all this sounds as gung-ho as the cognate French motto, pre-1940: *Nous vaincrons parce que nous sommes les plus forts*. Revisionist historians may deride it, as some deride our simple, brutal ethics; and even the most scrupulous find it hard to reconstruct. That, anyway, is how it was. Even God can't change it: but to keep it in mind is the very devil.

M

To Gottlob Fabian

(died at Tarnast, 4 March 1844)

In Vormärz Brandenburg
six iron generations back
across the blood and soil
you worked a windmill at Tarnast.

I know your stolid windmill,
gentle and firm, wooden and white,
set on the flats of Brandenburg,
tenderly taking the wind.

I know the stones, the stones that grind,
the principle of what is fine.
I know your watchfulness, your eye,
your patience, and your sky:

we are sails of the same windmill
stilled, tensed to a nameless, windstill
breathing culled from the very air,
again becoming air.

Michael Hulse

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D. J. Enright

Four Poems

National Character
Variations on a theme of Roy Fisher's

This is National Day. Some people call it Christmas, but
here it is the National Holiday. Since the National Religion
is a religious nationalism, the National Holiday is a
movable feast (National Dishes are feasted on) and could
well coincide next year with what some people call Bairam.
On such days National Strikes are sanctioned, it being more
convenient.

Foreign visitors in need of National Currency are enjoined
to call at the National Bank, watched over by National Guards.
Kindly policemen will provide you with National Assistance
at any hour without asking.
Our National Trust in human goodness is our National Pride.

The Day begins with the National Anthem, the language of which
changes from time to time in accord with the National Language.
The National Flower is worn in symbolic form as in these parts
it is rather rare.
National Dancers perform National Dances, carefully schooled
to respect National Honour and not conduct themselves like
international trollops,
and the National Pipe Band will play, which is truly indigenous
for they do not blow, they suck, and are clad in the National
Costume donned only on rare occasions.

Traditional morality plays are to be seen in the streets
featuring National Vices of the middle ages.
The National Poet has spent several years in the National House
of Correction correcting his verses and will read his Ode to the
Nation, National Security permitting.
In tribute to the National Beverage a contest is held for the
stoutest person in the land, the winner receiving the title of
Gross National Product.
The Grand National will be run in the National Park by bicyclists
mounted on National Velocipedes displaying the National Health,
followed by cross-country races, depending on National Boundaries.

In the event of snowstorms a National Disaster will be declared,
but foreign visitors are advised to remain standing since
proceedings will close with a speech by our National Leader,
to whom we owe an inestimable National Debt.
These are a few facets of our National Character.

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Bonefires

"Where men burn books they will soon be burning people."
Trust the literati to put ideas into our heads—
But it's true, when you come to think about it,
Practise on books and you'll be perfect with people.
And you could even use the books to burn the people on,
They work quite as well as faggots.
Speaking of which, you could also burn them.

Every bullet has its bill

The order of the day—
Home-grown charity
Sturdy independence
Accountability
Paying one's way.

When sentenced to death
One is shot economically
In the back of the head
And the bill for the bullet
Is sent to one's family.

Put something aside
For a rainy day
For one state-owned spent bullet:
Freeloading's ill advised
You pay your way.

"Why does almost everything seem to me like its own parody?" (Leverkühn)

It's difficult not to write parody.
But to write it is impossible,
For how can you hope to travesty
What is already incredible?

A novelist writes a parody
About a beefy black dictator
Disposed to every enormity:
Over the top, says the reviewer.

Then there appears a dictator
Beefy and black and real,
Who, if he had been a reader,
You would think had parodied the novel.

Nothing's left to us except plain sense,
Frank feelings, honest sentiments.

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NOTES & TOPICS

Visits to Mexico

By Hugh Thomas

THE ENGLISHMAN about to set off for Mexico seems to be confronted by an embarrassment of riches when he comes to think of books written by his countrymen in the past about that country. Who are the great English novelists of this century? Lawrence, Conrad, Huxley, Waugh, Greene? Each of them not only went to Mexico but (except perhaps for Conrad) wrote of it. I thought that, in the light of my own travelling and reading, I might consider some of these writers—supposing that the average cultivated traveller will prepare himself for a journey to Mexico by reading a few, or all, of the obvious books by them. I shall, however, begin my investigation by looking at an American writer, since his influence on people's thinking about Mexico over six generations has been more profound than that of any other single man. I refer, of course, to William Hickling Prescott.

Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* appeared in 1844, and was an immediate success. The style seemed that of a New England Macaulay—the same Macaulay who gave his instance of what every schoolboy knew as being "Who imprisoned Moctezuma and who strangled Atahualpa". The description by Prescott of places and countrysides in Mexico dazzled readers on both sides of the Atlantic in the last century. This was a remarkable achievement, since Prescott never went to Mexico—for the simple reason that he was blind. His left eye had been destroyed by a crust of bread thrown at him when he was at Harvard, and his other eye was later ruined by an inflammation of the retina. That infirmity makes his descriptive passages among the bravest *tours de force* in literature—for example, his paragraph describing how the modern traveller standing on the pyramid of Cholula can see 364 churches where Cortés saw 365 temples.

All the same, *The Conquest of Mexico* now shows signs of age. Thus the picture given by Prescott of Mexico before Cortés bears almost no relation to the facts established by nearly 150 years of subsequent archaeology. It is significant that neither the words "Olmec" nor even "Maya" appear in the index. And although Prescott describes Cortés's journey up from Vera Cruz to Mexico City wonderfully, the first conversation with Moctezuma, on the causeway near the site of the present church of San Antonio Abad, which might be considered the most extraordinary conversation in history—it was of course translated by interpreters—is not mentioned. That was because neither Prescott nor any 19th-century historian (or indeed many 20th-century historians) seems to have known of the Aztec testimony which was collected and written down by Franciscans such as Sahagún and Motolinía, and has been made more widely available by Miguel León-Portilla in his *La Visión de los Vencidos* (translated into English in 1962 as *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*).

Prescott's book will always be worth reading for its style, and because of the effect which it had on the reading public who have over the years wanted to know about Mexico: perhaps most of all for the effect it had on the soldiers in the United States Army which invaded Mexico only three years after *The Conquest* was published. Some officers even wrote to Prescott saying that they had used his work as a guidebook. Others were carried away by the excitement of the book, and gave to their own expedition in their imaginations some of the exaltation that Prescott describes Cortés's men as feeling. Every American ship had in that war its copy of Prescott. But I cannot help feeling that in 1989 the conquest of Mexico needs the kind of new work which John Hemming has indeed provided for Prescott's admittedly lesser work on the conquest of Peru,[1] and I plan to have a shot at this myself.

OF THE NOVELISTS of this century who may influence the English visitor, there is, first, Joseph Conrad, who told a correspondent that he had been to two ports in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1870s, the names of which were to him "of no significance". On the other hand, in 1875 or 1876, when in the Gulf of Mexico, he heard the story of a man stealing single-handed a lighter full of silver—an event which later formed the core of his masterpiece, *Nostromo*. Conrad also seemed to have met in Mexico the original of Ricardo in *Victory*. However, neither *Nostromo* nor *Victory* are books about Mexico.

We are on firmer ground with D. H. Lawrence, whose *The Plumed Serpent* is so renowned, whose travel impressions, *Mornings in Mexico*, are much admired, and one or two of whose short stories—such as "The Woman who Rode Away"—are also set in Mexico. Lawrence spent altogether about ten months there during 1923-25, in three separate expeditions. Two of these journeys were with his wife Frieda, and one was with the Danish painter Kai Gotzsche. Lawrence lived for nearly three months in Mexico City, for about the same amount of time at Chapala in the centre of Mexico, and for about four months in Oaxaca in the south. *The Plumed Serpent* was written in draft at Chapala and revised in what Lawrence considered the more barbaric surroundings of Oaxaca, where *Mornings in Mexico* was written.

[1] See John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (1970).

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Lawrence's views about Mexico varied wildly. Their inconsistency is shown by a series of letters which he wrote on a single day in April 1923. In half of them he said that he was tired of the country and wanted to go home to England immediately: the other half show him as thinking of staying on through the summer. That inconsistency is reflected in other letters, in which he sometimes insists that "there is something good about Mexico which opens the floodgates to one's soul"; and sometimes that Mexico is a "dry terrible land", a "black country" of "suspicious natives" and "wholesale cruelty". In the end this deeply hostile and negative mood triumphed in Lawrence's mind—partly, no doubt, because he contracted tuberculosis as well as dysentery and malaria. On the other hand, he allows his heroine Kate in *The Plumed Serpent* to remain in Mexico and participate fully in the revival of Aztec religion which he depicts as occurring, despite her frequent revulsion for what she calls these "lice-picking, down-dragging people".

BUT LAWRENCE'S EXPERIENCE of the Mexicans was more limited than seems at first sight to be the case. He spent most of his time with Anglo-Saxon expatriates. His one Mexican friend was the future diplomat Luis Quintanilla. Though he was a good linguist and learned enough Spanish to read the newspapers, Lawrence does not seem to have been aware of any local intellectual life (which, just after the end of the Revolution, was then most lively). He hated the muralist painters who at the very time he arrived in Mexico had been given their great opportunity by the remarkable writer Vasconcelos, who was then Secretary for Education. (Vasconcelos asked Lawrence to lunch, but had to cancel the invitation at the last minute because of a sudden Cabinet meeting; Lawrence fumed and did not go to the rearranged lunch the next day.)

Lawrence's experience of Mexico itself was also limited. He never went to Yucatan, never saw the great colonial cities of the centre such as Morelia and Guanajuato, and never seems to have visited a working *hacienda*.

I am not concerned here with any judgment about the literary merits of *The Plumed Serpent*, nor with why Lawrence had such a strong desire (see "The Woman who Rode Away" and "None of That") to make Anglo-Saxon women suffer for the sins of Anglo-Saxondom. I am concerned with Lawrence's vision of Mexico. I have two things only to say: first, that there are in these writings some vivid and truthful descriptions of the landscape; but, second, that the overwhelming impression left of the enduring appeal of Aztec religion among indigenous Mexicans is false.

On the latter matter, I quote Dr Manuel Gamío, the famous Mexican archaeologist:

> "Before coming to Mexico [wrote Gamío] Lawrence must surely have read passages of precolombian mythology, for he attributes to Ramón, Cipriano, and other characters of his novel concepts relative to Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl, despite the fact that the . . . names of these gods have been forgotten and are unknown to the Mexican people; only historians and specialised archaeologists know them. It is true that there are numerous surviving elements of precolombian culture among the people, but not in the way in which Lawrence refers. . . . Of the many aboriginal groups who have lived in contact with the whites, there exist many surviving elements of the precolombian periods, but not of a mythological nature . . . there is no concrete memory whatever of Huitzilopochtli, Quetzalcoatl, and other deities. Despite this, I feel that Lawrence's great intellect and his able penetration of ideas, situations and words make of his book a highly original novel."

These polite words are typically Mexican. ("As courteous as a Mexican Indian", a traveller wrote admiringly in the 17th century.) I wonder how English critics would treat a Mexican novelist's picture of the revival of the worship of Woden in 20th-century Kent, were it to occur. . . .

I don't think that it is pedantic to point out that the region near Lake Chapala where Lawrence plainly sites the main part of *The Plumed Serpent*, was, before Cortés, one ruled not by the Aztecs at all, but by the Tarascans, who never submitted to Moctezuma or his ancestors. Lawrence gave the Aztecs a triumph in English literature which they never obtained in history.

You may remember that Lawrence appears in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counterpoint* as Mark Rampion. Huxley came to know Lawrence well in the late 1920s in Italy. In 1933 the Huxleys followed the Lawrences to Mexico. Aldous Huxley's *Beyond the Mexique Bay*—the title derives from a line of Andrew Marvell's, as an indication of the most remote place that could be imagined by a 17th-century Cambridgeshire poet—is mostly about Guatemala; but the hundred or so pages about Huxley's month in Mexico are full of interest.

He arrived from Guatemala by boat, landed at a small port on the Tehuantepec peninsula, travelled by car and mule to Oaxaca, stayed on a coffee *hacienda*, and met men of letters in Mexico City, even if the conversation had to be conducted in French. (He also had the most unpleasant experience of being fired at by a drunkard in a bar at Éjutla, near Oaxaca.) Huxley appreciated with educated eyes several of the great baroque churches which are not only among the glories of Mexico but are testimony of the collaboration between Indian artists and Spanish bishop-architects in the 17th century.

All the same, some of his judgments do seem on the same level as those of Lawrence: half fearful, half-condescending. We thus hear in Miahutlań of "the reptilian glitter of Indian eyes"; and on the road to Oaxaca there is a landscape "which, though magnificent, one looks at with a sinking of the heart: there is something profoundly horrifying in this immense indefiniteness of the Mexican scene". And why, I wonder, did Huxley (like Graham Greene a few years later) so dislike the bandstands in the village squares?

I omit Harold Nicolson's short visit to Mexico, for biographical purposes, in 1935. (His own biographer curiously causes him to be awoken in Cuernavaca by the strong

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scent of plumbago, which has no scent). So my next English writer is Malcolm Lowry, who arrived in Mexico with his first wife in October 1936 and left, a wreck, without her, after twenty months, in July 1938. During this period, Lowry began—and indeed finished—a first draft of his great study of drunkenness, *Under the Volcano*. (It was, however, not published till 1947.) As in *The Plumed Serpent*, there are in this terrifying novel some wonderful passages about nature and other brilliant observations.

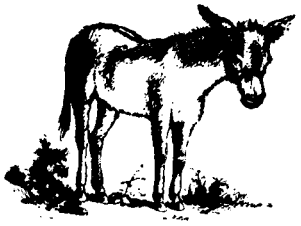
Under the Volcano presents a harsh picture of Mexico. It is almost as if the author is blaming Mexico for making alcohol so cheap and so available. The tragic drunkard who is the central figure of the novel is based, of course, on Lowry himself. Though he is much older than Lowry was, and is a Consul in the Foreign Service, he is evidently a Cambridge-educated drunk—Lowry came down from St Catharine's College in 1932—with what Lowry called "a King's Parade voice". (I must find out how Raul Ortiz, Lowry's brilliant translator into Spanish, rendered that. . . .) Thus, though his book seems to be about mezcal, and tequila, and pulque, it could very well—as Lowry's death in Ripe in Sussex later rubs home—have been about gin, had not the temperance movement made the price too high in England.

In a way Lowry's experience of Mexico was just as limited as that of Lawrence. Most of his twenty months there he spent in Cuernavaca; and *Under the Volcano* gives a good picture of what people do there—above all, what foreigners do there. All the same, despite that town's lovely site, its beautiful gardens, its role in the weekend life of Mexico City, Cuernavaca is no more Mexico than, for instance, Henley is England. The fact that it has a statue of Cortés shows its eccentricity; there is no other in Mexico.

Lowry knew Mexico City quite well. He also went to Oaxaca and several places near Cuernavaca, and spent a few lost weeks in Acapulco. But he seems to have had only one Mexican friend—Juan Fernando, whose job was to carry money from the Institute of Agrarian Reform to one or other of the *ejidos*, the revived agrarian communities. Otherwise his knowledge of Mexicans was confined to the people whom he met in bars, his doctors, the policemen who arrested him, and some officials who helped him get out of the country.

While Lowry was in Mexico, Graham Greene arrived.

Of Donkeys & Dust



M. LARUELLE'S WAY *led through half-cultivated fields bordered by narrow grass paths, trodden by cactus farmers coming home from work. It was thus far a favourite walk, though not taken since before the rains. The leaves of cacti attracted with their freshness; green trees shot by evening sunlight might have been weeping willows tossing in the gusty wind which had sprung up; a lake of yellow sunlight appeared in the distance below pretty hills like loaves. But there was something baleful now about the evening. Black clouds plunged up to the south. The sun poured molten glass on the fields. The volcanoes seemed terrifying in the wild sunset. M. Laruelle walked swiftly, in the good heavy tennis shoes he should have already packed, swinging his tennis racket. A sense of fear had possessed him again, a sense of being, after all these years, and on his last day here, still a stranger. Four years, almost five, and he still felt like a wanderer on another planet. . . .*

HOW CONTINUALLY, **how startlingly, the landscape changed! Now the fields were full of stones: there was a row of dead trees. An abandoned plough, silhouetted against the sky, raised its arms to heaven in mute supplication; another planet, he reflected again, a strange planet where, if you looked a little further, beyond the Tres Marías, you would find every sort of landscape at once, the Cotswolds, Windermere, New Hampshire, the meadows of the Eure-et-Loire, even the grey dunes of Cheshire, even the Sahara, a planet upon which, in the twinkling of an eye, you could change climates, and, if you cared to think so, in the crossing of a highway, three civilizations; but beautiful, there was no denying its beauty, fatal or cleansing as it happened to be, the beauty of the Earthly Paradise itself. . . .**

HE CAME TO THE *Alcapancingo road. A car was passing and as he waited, face averted, for the dust to subside, he recalled that time motoring with Yvonne and the Consul along the Mexican lake-bed, itself once the crater of a huge volcano, and saw again the horizon softened by dust, the buses whizzing past through the whirling dust, the shuddering boys standing on the backs of the lorries holding on for grim death, their faces bandaged against the dust (and there was a magnificence about this, he always felt, some symbolism for the future, for which such truly great preparation had been made by a heroic people, since all over Mexico one could see those thundering lorries with those young builders in them, standing erect, their trousers flapping hard, legs planted wide, firm) and in the sunlight, on the round hill, the lone section of dust advancing, the dusk-darkened hills by the lake like islands in driving rain. . . .*

Two ragged Indians were approaching M. Laruelle through the dust; they were arguing, but with the profound concentration of university professors wandering in summer twilight through the Sorbonne. Their voices, the gestures of their refined grimy hands, were unbelievably courtly, delicate. Their carriage suggested the majesty of Aztec princes, their faces obscure sculpturings on Yucatecan ruins. . . . They passed into the dusk.

Malcolm Lowry
UNDER THE VOLCANO *(1947)*

"I WILL LIFT UP **my eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my strength." At least one can always do *that*, in Mexico. In a stride, the town passes away. Before us lies the gleaming, pinkish-ochre of the valley flat, wild and exalted with sunshine. On the left, quite near, bank the stiffly pleated mountains, all the foot-hills, that press savannah-coloured into the savannah of the valley. The**

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They did not meet. Greene's journey lasted about two months, and on the strength of them he produced two books: *The Lawless Roads*, a travel book published in 1939, which more or less describes what happened to him in Mexico, and *The Power and the Glory* (1940), probably Greene's most famous novel. Most literate people have read it, though perhaps not till the 1950s, when it became world-famous thanks to a good review by François Mauriac.

Graham Greene said once that this book gave him more satisfaction than any other that he had written. He has given two somewhat contradictory accounts of its purpose: first, that he wanted to "write a study of the religious persecution [in Mexico], then in its final stage"; second, that he saw the book as an attempt to "understand a permanent religious situation: the function of the priesthood. I was much more interested in the theological point of view than the religious one."

The Power and the Glory still reads as an excellent novel. It describes evil, weakness, courage, cold-heartedness, and saintliness in a remarkable way. A rereading has reminded me how original the writing often is: as with the novels by Lawrence and Lowry, there are wonderful passages about landscape and other interesting observations. But however good it may be as a novel, it does not seem to be a good book about Mexico. Even the background of the persecution of the Church is badly done, enough to irritate at the same time the Church and the Government. The novel purports to be an historical novel, set in 1927-28, but there is no mention in it, even by implication, that in Mexico those were the years of the Cristero war. Greene chose to set his book in the two provinces which were not directly affected by that conflict, but even so that neglect seems odd. The explanation of the historical inadequacies (not the literary or artistic ones) can perhaps be found in *The Lawless Roads*. From this book, we can see that Greene's Spanish was poor; and that, like Lawrence, he had no time to look into Mexican intellectual life. He travelled alone, and seems to have met few Mexicans apart from "the last of the Caudillos", General Cedillo.

As Evelyn Waugh remarked in a review, Greene made "no disguise of the fact that Mexico disgusted him". "I have never been in a country where you are more aware of hate", Greene wrote; and in a later edition of *The Power and The Glory* he says that, by the time he left, he had formed such a distaste for Mexico that even the thought of an English prison—to which he feared he might be sent because of a pending libel action—provided relief. "The problem", Waugh continued, "is that England disgusts him too". It was true: Sean O'Faolain was once passing through a pleasant town in Hertfordshire, in a pastoral setting, and suddenly became aware that this was the allegedly hideous town anathematised by Greene in his introduction to *The Lawless Roads*.

There have since 1940 been many new editions of *The Power and the Glory*. In none of those that I have seen is there any notice that in the Mexican presidential election campaign of 1940, the very year of its first publication, the victorious candidate Avila Camacho was persuaded to admit (by his mother, so his niece assured me) that "I too am a believer".

In 1989, the landscape of the Graham Greene zone of Mexico has changed dramatically. Villahermosa is now a fine city with a magnificent archaeological park and splendid modern architecture, while Palenque is, deservedly, looked on as one of the wonders of the world. But in all those years since 1940, and before, the Church has been in an uncomfortable position since it has had no recognition as a legal entity. I saw last December, from my seat in the back row of the Mexican Parliament, the arrival for the first time in Mexican history of five prelates at the inauguration of the new President. A few minutes later, I heard the new President use the words ". . . and the Church", ". . . *y la Iglesia*", as a section of society which he hoped would support him in his announced efforts to rejuvenate the nation. It was the first time since the 1850s that a Mexican President had officially recognised that the Church existed.

I CANNOT RESIST a few words about Evelyn Waugh's forgotten book about Mexico, *Robbery Under Law*. Waugh wrote it on the invitation of Clive Pearson, the brother

mountains are clothed smokily with pine, *ocote*, and, like a woman in a gauze *rebozo*, they rear in a rich blue fume that is almost cornflower-blue in the clefts. It is their characteristic that they are darkest blue at the top. Like some splendid lizard with a wavering, royal-blue crest down the ridge of his back, and pale belly, and soft, pinky-fawn claws, on the plain.

Between the pallor of the claws, a dark spot of trees, and white dots of a church with twin towers. Further away, along the foot-hills, a few scattered trees, white dot and stroke of a *hacienda*, and a green, green square of sugar-cane. Further off still, at the mouth of a cleft of a canyon, a dense little green patch of trees, and two spots of proud church. . . .

NOWHERE *more than in Mexico does human life become isolated, external to its surroundings, and cut off tinily from the environment. Even as you come across the plain to a big city like Guadalajara, and see the twin towers of the cathedral peering around in loneliness like two lost birds side by side on a moor, lifting their white heads to look around in the wilderness, your heart gives a clutch, feeling the pathos, the isolated tininess of human effort. As for building a church with one tower only, it is unthinkable. There must be two towers, to keep each other company in this wilderness world.*

THE MORNING **is still early, the brilliant sun does not burn too much. Tomorrow is the shortest day. The savannah valley is shadeless, spotted only with the thorny ravel of mesquite bushes. Down the trail that has worn grooves in the turf—the rock is near the surface—occasional donkeys with a blue-hooded woman perched on top come tripping in silence, twinkling, a shadow. Just occasional women taking a few vegetables to market. Practically no men. It is Sunday.**

D. H. Lawrence
MORNINGS IN MEXICO *(1927)*

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of Lord Cowdray, who wanted a well-known author to denounce the régime of President Cárdenas, which had just nationalised the oil industry. So Waugh went to Mexico in August and September 1938.

Not much evidence survives, it seems, of this visit. There are no diary entries, and apparently only one letter (to Henry Green). This absence of material must be why a distinguished Mexican assured me that actually Waugh had never been to Mexico, he had written his travelogue in the London Library, a modern version of Madame d'Aulnoy. Regretfully, I must reject this tale. However, I have not been able to find where Waugh went in Mexico. He spoke no Spanish, and his biographer tells us that, when he and his wife wanted to know what was happening in the Munich crisis, they bought the newspapers, and "set themselves to decypher the Spanish texts"—for all the world as if it were ancient Maya.

Waugh was afterwards rather ashamed of *Robbery Under Law*, and it was the only one of his travel books of the 1930s from which he excluded any extract in his post-War collection, *When the Going was Good*. But *Robbery Under Law* is worth looking at as a polemic against the government of President Cardénas, for the critical issue of the nationalisation of the Mexican oil industry could still be a live one. I was staying in the same hotel as Waugh did—the charming, central, family-run, very unritzy Ritz Hotel—and was, one fine morning, walking along the Calle Madero towards the Alameda when I became aware of a procession of very angry men and women coming towards me at a great pace. This turned out to be a demonstration against the arrest that morning of "La Quina", the legendary oil-workers' union leader. For weeks afterwards, the Mexican press was full of stories of the corrupt wealth of La Quina and of the 36 or so other union leaders arrested with him. Was it in Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, or in the *Excelsior* newspaper, that we read of three million dollars' worth of jewels (principally rings and watches) being found in the boot of a trade-union leader's car? It was the latter.

IT IS A RELIEF to say that there are two books by my fellow citizens which I can recommend unreservedly. I say "fellow citizens", coyly, because both are women, and one was born a Scot. The two books are Sybille Bedford's *A Visit to Don Otavio* and Fanny Calderón de la Barca's *Life in Mexico*.

Sybille Bedford spent several months in Mexico in the late 1940s. She met a lot of people in Mexico City, saw the great cities of the centre (which no other famous English visitor in my list seems to have done), and stayed for a long time at Lake Chapala on a slightly dilapidated *hacienda* which she calls El Dorado. It is not at all far from the house which D. H. Lawrence rented. But the difference between Sybille Bedford's Chapala and D. H. Lawrence's is the difference between light and day. For the former brilliantly captures—and the visit to the *hacienda* is the heart of the book—the mood of the old Spanish Mexican upper class, all its generosity, sense of hospitality, and unhurried resignation, at a critical moment between what might he called decay and recovery. You may say that that is a class which does not deserve commemoration. That is certainly a point of view, and it is one which is widely held. Earlier this year, however, I stayed in Sinaloa, at another *hacienda* also rejoicing in the enchanted name El Dorado, and gained the distinct impression that to neglect such an oligarchy, with such a long-proved capacity for renewal and survival, could be a serious mistake of judgment.

Fanny Calderón's book is based on letters which she wrote when she went to Mexico as the wife of the Spanish Minister. Having been born in Edinburgh of a wholly Scottish family, she was well prepared to survive the many hair-raising experiences which she and her husband encountered on their extensive travels. She survived a revolution in Mexico City, escaped bandits, crossed swollen rivers in remote gorges, and even received a visit from the entire Mexican Cabinet who came to beg her not to wear a certain, as they supposed indelicate gown at a fancy-dress ball.

Of all the books published about Mexico in the 19th century, this one (despite the criticisms of Britain's premier Mexicanist, Dr D. A. Brading of Cambridge) seems to me to be the one which is likely to survive. Fanny Calderón lived a far fuller life in Mexico than even Sybille Bedford. She dined out a great deal, talked to hundreds of cultivated people of all ages, and spent a lot of time looking at the monasteries and nunneries which were then still in possession of half the country—a fact which goes a long way to explain the virulence of subsequent Mexican anti-clericalism.

Prescott persuaded Fanny Calderón to publish her account in 1843, the same year that his own work was first issued. Regrettably and incomprehensibly, the magnificent complete edition of this wonderful book, edited in the United States by Howard and Marion Fisher in 1966, has never been issued in Britain.

WHAT WOULD these various writers have made of today's Mexico? In the capital city of this nation of great cities, I have found diversity of historical experience, as of architecture—and indeed of life in every sense of the word—without equal. Only in Rome, Athens, and Peking, surely, is there a similar juxtaposition of buildings from different ages such as one finds when one turns from a visit to the Cathedral to the remains of the Aztec temple just next door. You can travel, if you are lucky, within fifteen minutes from the surviving 18th-century plaza of the Inquisition to the Museum of Anthropology, which is one of the best reminders in the world of the beauty of modern architecture.

The social life of Mexico City, in San Angel, or Las Lomas, I find in most ways more genuinely cosmopolitan than that of London, for those Mexicans who have travelled have what seems to me to be a real affection for the European cities which they know—above all for Paris—which makes our Anglo-Saxon protests that we in this island are now Europeans seem a little hollow.

Above all, what a triumph! "What are we to do with these enormous towns?" asked Lord Liverpool of Cha-

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teaubriand. "One false step and we are lost!" That was in 1823, when London had a population of about a million, the same as Mexico City did in Aldous Huxley's day. Now Mexico City has a population of over twenty million, yet they mostly have electricity and water, there is public transport and an education and hospital service, and one sees very few people without shoes—which could not have been said when D. H. Lawrence was there in the 1920s. Of course, I know there is the worst pollution in the world, I know from personal experience that one can be stuck in a traffic jam so long as to be over two hours late for lunch, I know that the poverty in the shanty towns is appalling, that there are two murders a minute, and that there are some atrocious examples of ugly modern buildings. All the same, I very much doubt whether a city authority in a so-called advanced country could be certain to have coped so well as that responsible for Mexico City has over the last two generations, had they been faced with the same problems. . . .

But of course the writers I have discussed were not concerned with the problems that trouble great cities. They were mostly searching for their own darknesses, their own illuminations—and that is what they found.

Armchair Traveller

By Roy Kerridge

"SEND ME TO THE West Indies? Certainly not!" I told a disconcerted Fleet Street editor recently. "It's far too hot there, and anyway I have a morbid fear of airports."

Why go abroad, when people of many lands can now be found in England? Of all the people who have not so much sought a new life Abroad but have (in an Imperial sense) come Home, few are as underrated, interesting and well-mannered as the people of Ghana.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to attend the Universal Prayer Group, a West African congregration who worship at St Saviour's, Chalk Farm, in North London. Most of the Group are Ashantis from Ghana. Every pew in the imposing Victorian church was full, for two visiting Ashanti Chiefs had been invited, and everyone was eager to do them honour.

Women in white headscarves sat on one side of the aisle, men in suits on the other, and a few loving couples sat together. Between stone arches and below lustrous blue-and-red stained-glass pictures a band with amplifiers had been set up. Hands thudded on conga drums in African rhythms. These age-old rhythms were augmented by the music of a rock'n'roll drum-kit and three electric guitars. Sweet, expressive tones poured from a saxophone wielded by J. K. Mensah, a middle-aged man in glasses who used to play the dance-halls in a big band. Gospel songs in Twi—the Ashanti language—were sung with spirit, girl dancers flashing mischievous eyes at the congregation.

Mr Boafa, the prayer group leader, called on a young couple to stand up, and announced that they were newly-weds. Everyone cheered and cried "Alleluya!" Smiling broadly, the couple danced up to the front, followed by the whole women's choir, leaving rows of empty pews. African drumming, rhythm upon rhythm, reached a crescendo as the laughing ladies of the choir, dressed in crimson gowns, danced out in a line, each with one arm raised to wave a twirling white handkerchief. In New Orleans jazz processions, this dance, complete with handkerchieves, is known as the Second Line. As in New Orleans, the rest of the crowd followed on behind. From beginning to end, the Prayer Group seemed a joyous, carefree occasion, quite different from the intense impassioned severity of a Nigerian church. Acquaintances greeted me with smiles.

Preaching and singing in English and Twi followed, with a respectful silence as the vicar of St Saviour's, Christopher Neil-Smith, looked in and beckoned me out for tea in the vicarage. He gave his apologies to Mr Boafa, and assured him that I would be returned shortly. It seemed strange to be snatched so suddenly from Ghana and transported to a cheerful middle-class English family tea party. Before long, I was in Ghana once more.

Taking my seat, I was just in time to hear the resident Chief, Kuffour the Second, call on the visiting Chiefs to come forward. From nowhere, two well-built men in bright multi-striped togas appeared and took their seats at the table. One of them, stout and bespectacled, would have looked like an accountant were he not in noble Roman attire, one arm and shoulder bare. The other Chief, introduced by Kuffour as "a Big Chief", smiled at us with the air of a genial warrior relaxing after a successful campaign. Eulogies to the chiefs followed, as the service ended with the triumphant organ music of Kweku-Acquaah-Harrison, formerly of the Band of the Royal Marines. A choir girl swayed up and down the aisle, offering doughnuts on a tray.

I JOINED the congregation in the vestry, where the two Chiefs sat in state, gracefully accepting the homage of their people. They shook hands without rising from their chairs.

"You must be the same as an English lord", I remarked to the warrior Chief.

"No, a duke—a duke!" an aide whispered urgently.

Upon the ducal hand shone a roughly-cut ring of gold, ornamented by a large golden cross.

"The ring symbolises the sacred stool of his village", I was told.

Ashantis lost the great golden stool wherein lay the sovereignty of their nation at the Sack of Kumasi in 1874.

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Presumably looted by a British soldier, its whereabouts is unknown.

"I think the stool is in this country", the Chief's aide told me, rather stiffly.

"If I had been around in those days, I would have made the thief give it back", I boasted; and I parted from the Ashanti on the best of terms.

Most of my information about Ghana has been learned from the letters of my pen-friend, Louis Baba. University-educated, with a taste for George Orwell, Louis Baba has not turned his back on village life and African ideas. Instead he has chosen the arduous life of an animal collector and exporter for zoos, pet shops, and museums. I am inclined to look on Education and its offshoot Marxism as twin curses brought to 20th-century Africa by the white man. Exceptional Africans, however, do not take Education as a fetish that banishes Old Africa, but as a charm that helps them to appreciate their traditions and explain these to others. Such an exceptional man is Louis Baba, equally at home in a library as in the deep bush, and able to write of his experiences in a strange, powerful, and surrealistic style.

Keith Stiff, the young co-director of the Cleethorpes Tropical Butterfly Gardens, employed Louis Baba as a trapper, interpreter and guide on a recent expedition to Ghana in search of rare butterflies and spiders. Before an interested audience of 200 captive tarantulas, each in a cellophane container, Keith told me of his admiration for Baba as friend, naturalist, "bush expert", and a scholar who speaks seven West African languages. Photographs showed Louis Baba to be a tall young man in a peaked cap, looking not unlike a reggae singer.

"I spent three years in Nigeria as a teacher, and I never saw a single snake in all that time", Keith informed me. "On my very first day in the bush with Louis Baba, he showed me a green mamba gliding through the forest. Louis Baba attended Cape Coast University. When you see what West Africans go through to get an education, you have to admire a village boy who gets to university. At the school where I taught in Nigeria, the African teachers scarcely bothered to work at all, reckoning it was beneath them. Boys would walk miles in bare feet to get to school, and then sit in the classroom for hours, just hoping a teacher would turn up."

I will now turn the rest of my article over to Louis Baba's Ghana, as described in his letters. If an English publisher should see this, so much the better. There may be a book in Baba.

"I AM THIRTY-ONE, and I'm a bachelor, though I don't say this will be forever", writes Louis Baba. "I look far older than this age because of the nature of my work. I count myself fortunate, because many are far worse off. Krika, one of our best snake catchers, now limps . . . . I am a Christian.

"I am sitting at Kwame Nkrumah Circle, an ideal siesta for tired persons. Around me are Chadian refugees who have been camped here since they asked this country for that status. Drought has ruined their herd-stocking activities. Long before that, civilisation, peace and law had spoilt their nomadic raids on other people's *kraals*. A mad girl, who just passed in front of me, threw stones at a sober girl who, on being urged by some of the onlookers, retaliated and drove off her attacker."

Of a man who was accused of forgetting the previous day's errand: "He turned round as though expecting to find yesterday behind him."

Arthurian scholars will be particularly interested in Louis Baba's account of Okomfo Anokye, the Ashanti Merlin, who cast a miraculous sword—the Ashanti Excalibur, which can still be seen embedded in the ground awaiting the Ashanti Arthur. Okomfo Anokye also commanded the ill-fated golden stool to descend on Ashantiland from the sky.

"'Okomfo' is the Ashanti word for fetish priest . . . . The gold stool was for unity, and was to be kept in Kumasi. In 1824 the Ashantis defeated the English in one battle, cutting off the head of the governor, Sir Charles McCarthy, the skull of which they possess today. So for the English governor's head, the Ashanti's golden stool."

"WHEN I WAS ABOUT seven years old, Moussi people rode on donkeys from their shires to the markets of Northern Ghana, to buy sackloads of cola-nuts. These merchants covered distances of over a hundred miles in two days, often stopping under chosen trees to huddle up when passing the nights. Armed with daggers and scimitars, they were solid against intrusion. Children were their true friends.

"When we had spotted them far off riding up, we ran to form a line across the path as if to deny them passage. The moment they drew close we threw our hands in the air, as they do in war surrenders or boxing victories. Then down we bent to sweep the road for them to ride on 'clean ground'. We did this with singing:

Moussi, Royal son, don't go to war!
Moussi, Royal son, don't go to war!
May God answer your prayers.
May you marry up to ten wives.
May you produce up to ten children.
May you buy up to ten cola nuts.
Moussi, Royal son, don't go to war!

They never seemed to have enough of this, as they continually rewarded us with coins, which we kept for ourselves, or threw us cola-nuts, which we gave to old people.

"Until recently, barely up to 30 men could be categorised as hunters in this country. The hunter was not one who merely used a shooting gun. It was a special cult, which it took extraordinary initiations to belong in. Nowadays any person who can identify a section of the bush frequented by game can be a hunter, if he so wishes. The old type had a lot to reveal, as they revered their pre-hunting rituals and mythology.

"When I happened to show the picture of a bear to an old-style hunter, he easily identified it as 'Sisi'. There it started. Next I showed the same picture to an old-style hunter in the northern regions. Quickly it was identified

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as 'Tingambonga' or 'Underground Donkey'. Were they so sure we had bears living here? They were sure of it, in the forests and in the highlands.

"Then I took the picture of a polar bear around. 'That's Sisi all right, except that it is white', and 'That's Tingambonga, though I've never come across this white variety'.

"So stayed the puzzle. These were the hunters who made their mark by stalking an elephant to a vantage point before spearing it at the range of 25 yards. With three poison-tipped arrows, two shot to the neck, one into the side, they topple the buffalo. When they have returned home with the head and the tail of the elephant (their prize) they then direct the able ones in the village. 'Go and cut out each according to his ability.' They don't run away from wounded lions, but follow and later trace the carcase. And these were the people identifying the bear. What do you do if the frog comes out of the water and says the crocodile has died?"

Bears are not supposed, by Western naturalists, to live in Africa south of the Sahara. Suddenly Louis Baba remembered the honey badger, which resembles a miniature bear in shape. The mystery was solved—Sisi and company were not bears, but badgers! History repeats itself, for white naturalists in Kenya 40 years ago heard rumours of an African bear, and showed tribesmen pictures of various bruins, all recognised eagerly. But most reports of the mysterious "Nandi Bear" referred to the honey badger, a fearsome beast who might well be termed a miniature grizzly.

"The badger holds a high place in the jujuman's potions, for its ability to dig can only be supernatural. So the jujuman tells his client if he wants a charm for vanishing into or beyond vaults he must bring the hide of a badger. When it has been prepared, it is mostly used for robberies."

FORTUNATELY, Louis Baba, on his visits to Nigeria, is protected from robbers by his friend Interpol. "Interpol has been a good friend to me in the Lagos hustle. In my first time in Nigeria, obviously at risk with so much possessions but as a greenhorn oblivious of it, Interpol took me in. When I resisted his experience, I was thrice attacked by robbers in the night.

"'Look', begins Interpol with a warning, 'you are no more courageous than I am; don't venture to see the Lagos night. Lagos is Lagos! Those who no know go know, and those who know too much go quench.'

"In the area where he lived in Lagos, Interpol is famed for this, his nickname. Once when Ijora was engulfed in fire and the Nigerian Fire Brigade came and didn't proceed to work immediately (they at first summoned the landlords to haggle for their illicit fee) Interpol grabbed their water hose and literally entered the flames to attack the fire. He did it so expertly he won kudos from the firemen themselves. He was at that moment too stoned to feel the flames licking at his ribs, so today he bears those scars. Marijuana is the stigma of his life."

Trapping animals and birds in the bush, and listening to the magical stories of villagers in remote parts of Ghana, seem to be the chief interests of Louis Baba: "Maybe one day I will sneak into a sacred arboretum and discover ten giant African pythons coiled on their eggs. Maybe in a far village one day a flock of Touracos will startle me by converging on a single fruit tree to compete in their feedings . . . ."

Sacred groves, magic forests and holy lakes were "nature reserves" long before white people introduced the term. "One night I had shone my torchlight on the top of a cotton tree . . . . There in sleep were three green tree-snakes. In other nights, I have seen them curled up sleeping, always in the same positions.

"On the recent trek to Komenda, I was told of three girls who had confessed to being they who had turned into the snakes and rendezvoused on the cotton tree to plot their witchcrafting. What might have constituted outright nonsense in daytime frightened me a bit, as I was told it in the night when I was going to sleep. The fact that I had flashed light on them many a time didn't reassure me in any way . . . . After their chain of confessions, the cotton tree got axed down. I am only thinking there was no need to punish a helpless tree." In Jamaica also, the silk-cotton tree is held to be a tree of witchcraft. According to Louis Baba, the self-confessed witches sought "spiritual asylum" in a pagan sanctuary.

"I was told of how spot nose monkeys sat on tree tops and sneered at human beings . . . . I find your pheasant hunting with gun impracticable here. Suppose you miss twice and hit at the third try, you have lost money between the cartridge shop and the meat market.

"Accra is currently gripped by fears. These are based on whirlwinds of rumours that strange persons are in the country seeking human heads to take to neighbouring countries. Police refute these wild stories and try to assure the public that their safety is not rocked. But for two days running, a thousand people rushed at the police station to see the three human heads in a basket. No, the police had nothing of the sort. So where did the story come from?

"A prowler broke into a house at night and got caught. At the police station he readily admitted that he broke in to steal a hen, as he had done before. But the people disagree: 'No, you didn't break in to steal *hen*, it's *head*, and that's *human head*'.

"The thief is loud in protest and the police say it is too early to conclude."

V. S. Naipaul noted similar rumours in the Ivory Coast. In England, the gargoyles on medieval churches are all that now remains of the Cult of the Head.

I wonder what Louis Baba would make of England, were he to come here. Perhaps one day I shall know, if the writer is not afraid of our weather and our airports. Farewell to Ghana.

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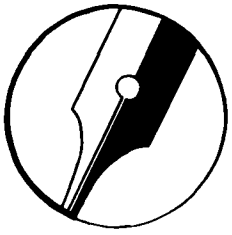
Calling the Kettle Black

Some Thoughts on "Cultural Imperialism"—By MICHAEL THORPE



I AM WELL AWARE that this is a controversial, even abrasive topic. We in the West are hypersensitive to accusations of "cultural imperialism". Nowadays, "Eurocentric" is commonly used pejoratively, to signify exploitative, racist dominance; while "universalist" often appears in inverted commas, denoting its futility, or to suggest that it is merely a mask for Eurocentrism. Thus, to Chinweizu and others in *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature*, a "'universalist' setting [means] outside Africa". Or there is Edward Said's definition of Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient".[1]

I am concerned to do something to retrieve the meaning of universal values, and to argue—against blind retreat behind racial barricades of any colour or creed, whatever past or present injuries may be—that there is no gain in substituting "Afrocentric", for example, for "Eurocentric"; so that when we speak of these issues we may sometimes be seen as affirming or aspiring to establish human, not racist, values.

As an undergraduate, I had an early crash course in "the evils of colonialism" from a fellow student, Jacob Ajayi (later the University of Ibadan's Professor of History and Vice-Chancellor), who was among the first Nigerians sent to English Universities in the pre-Independence decade. Some years afterwards, teaching in Nigeria, I was put more roughly in my white place by a black colleague whose work I had to supervise—and criticise. "Go back", he burst out, "to your filthy Birmingham!" Well, I had never set foot in Birmingham and never intend to, nor was I anything but a voluntary expatriate from Britain. However, my apparent identity was, and is, inevitably straitjacketed by race and colour.

Taking the liberal view, it is all too plain where the fault lies. Opposing "civilisation" to "savagery", English imperialists in the 19th and early 20th centuries masked their real aims with the cant of superior Anglo-Saxon values. Thus, for the first historian of the partition of Africa, J. S. Keltie, it was simply a case of "the one barbarous continent parcelled out among the most civilised powers of Europe", while Sir Arthur Hirtzel in *The Call of Empire* (1917) believed that:

> ". . . what really motivates the imperialist is the firm belief that the race to which he belongs is the noblest and the civilization and the ideas for which it stands are the highest, are in fact, so high that all the world accept them."

Sarah Jeanette Duncan's imperialist, Lorne Murchison, had spoken for not a few Canadians when he lauded England as "the conscience of the world and the Mecca of the race".

The liberal critique of these hyperboles offers such striking examples as the Forsterian line, from Wilberforce through Forster's great-aunt, Marianne Thornton, to E. M. Forster himself, with the plea for tolerance and interracial understanding of *A Passage to India* and, on the brink of Indian Independence, his welcoming of imminent change: "The backward races are kicking—and more power to their boots."[2]

THE ENGLISH liberal critique focused strongly upon the publicly glamorised Raj: yet already in the high Victorian period English confidence began to be eroded with the Indian Mutiny of 1857,[3] and more deeply in 1920 with the Amritsar Massacre. Until that time the most heard literary voices were imperial apologists and jingoistic trumpeters, from the innumerable Mutiny novelists and Tennyson (with his "Niggers are tigers" reaction to the 1865 Revolt in Jamaica) to the Rider Haggards, Hentys, Buchans and Kiplings.

Few such voices were raised after Kipling's death: irony, satire, the self-laceration of the troubled white conscience became dominant notes. After Forster, George Orwell, more bitterly informed by first-hand experience as a colonial

[1] Chinweizu *et al.*, *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* (Howard V.O., Washington, D.C., 1983), p. 105; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), p. 3.

[2] J. S. Keltie, *The Partition of Africa* (1985), p. 1; Sir Arthur Hirtzel is quoted in J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (Viking, 1986), p. 170. Sarah Jeanette Duncan, *The Imperialist* (1904; McClelland & Stewart, 1984), p. 170. E. M. Forster, "The Challenge of Our Time" (1946), in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (Penguin, 1965), p. 65.

[3] Though it was celebrated contemporaneously as "the epic of the race" (James Morris, *Heaven's Command*, 1973; Penguin, 1979, p. 243), the Mutiny marked the onset of a continual struggle to maintain English dominance.

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policeman, could expose in "Shooting an Elephant" the ludicrous "superiority" of the insecure white sahib. Looking back with judicious hindsight after Indian Independence came Paul Scott's conscientiously probing *Raj Quartet*; and in 1973 J. G. Farrell's *Siege of Krishnapur* wittily and ironically juxtaposed the inflated self-celebration of the Victorians' Great Exhibition against the Great Humiliation of the Mutiny.

Critical examples could be multiplied, from the African and Caribbean theatres of Empire, to demonstrate a constant liberal effort to puncture the pretensions of what Joseph Conrad, reacting to Leopold II's atrocities in the Belgian Congo, ironically dubbed "the apostles of light". However, over the past 30 years critical leadership has passed to the new English literatures of the decolonised nations, whose overriding concern has been to rehabilitate suppressed or denigrated peoples: to restore to them a pre-colonial past which was not, in Chinua Achebe's words, "one long night of savagery from which the white man, acting on God's behalf, delivered us".[4]

Achebe's and others' revaluations, or reconstructions (given the paucity of written history), endow "savage" ancestors with complex laws of social organisation and conduct, and humanise them with a capacity for sensitive personal relations. New national heroes are resurrected from the old imperial demonology; Shaka the Zulu, Nana Sahib (the Demon of Cawnpore), the mulatto politician G. W. Gordon (whom Governor Eyre hanged in Jamaica) become freedom-fighters, martyred by an imperialism of power rather than principle. African critics demand that whites should reread and deconstruct *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Heart of Darkness* from unflattering black perspectives.[5]

REVISIONIST LITERATURE and history were inevitable, necessary, and therapeutic; but there has also emerged a revisionist ideology no less biased than the imperial kind, in whose creation contemporary Western liberals eagerly collaborate and to which Western opinion defers. Nirad C. Chaudhuri observed this phenomenon twenty years ago:

> ". . . if one were to consider only the immediate interests of policy and not its long-term results, it has to be admitted that the abject fear the West displays in respect of everything said or published about contemporary India and the other newly emancipated countries, is fully justified. Public opinion in all these countries is absurdly sensitive on this score, and even the highest in those countries . . . are hurt and annoyed by the publication of anything short of fulsome praise."[6]

In the face of such "positive discrimination", Westerners who attempt to evaluate or advocate a more balanced judgment of the imperial legacy are liable to have levelled at them the dirty word of our time, "racist". The Nigerian authors of *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* (who dismiss ENCOUNTER as a "colonialist propaganda organ") tell such critics to mind their own ethical and ethnic business:

> "Neither European praise nor European blame should matter to a liberated African consciousness [which] will do and judge things entirely on its own grounds. . . . If Europeans are pleased, it doesn't matter; if they are not, it doesn't matter."[7]

Guilt-stricken whites retreat before such intimidating voices. The recent faltering of that once astringent voice of the white liberal conscience in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer, sadly illustrates this. In her James Lecture (1982) she struggled with the question of whether "white writers should write about blacks", and posited the necessity for whites to become reconciled to taking a peripheral role in the formation of Azania, the black-dominated state that may succeed Afrikanerdom.

Until *Burger's Daughter* (1979) Gordimer's fiction encompassed deep, troubling complexity; but despite her sympathies blacks attacked her for presuming to characterise them at all, attractively or not. She was forced to recognise that, as she said at the "Writer and Human Rights" conference in Toronto in 1981, only "relevance and commitment" counted. In her 1987 novel *A Sport of Nature* her black figures are unreservedly romanticised. Though she does (unlike Wole Soyinka in his Nobel Speech against apartheid) acknowledge the atrocity of "necklacing" in the black townships, it is virtually explained away as symptomatic of a fevered response to white injustice.[8]

NOWHERE IS the deferential conscience more craven than in its failure to express even-handed concern at contemporary outbursts of that "savagery" which ethnocentric Victorians had blamed solely upon blacks. Is apartheid singled out as especially abhorrent because it is white, shaming the civilised pretensions which, at bottom, whites expect only of whites?

Alienated white liberalism not only defers to black claims, but allows under the aegis of "Empire" no worthy achievement whatsoever. Allan Bloom, in *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), gives a striking example of the disabling moral relativism this blanket rejection engenders in his students:

> "What right, they ask, do I or anyone else have to say one [culture] is better than the others? If I pose the routine question designed to confute them and make

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[4] Chinua Achebe, "The Novelist as Teacher" (1965) in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (Heinemann, 1975), p. 45.

[5] See, for example D. Dabydeen, ed., *The Black Presence in English Literature* (Manchester University Press, 1985); Michael J. C. Echeruo, *Joyce Cary and the Novel of Africa* (Longman, 1973); Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa", *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1978), pp. 1-15; Michael Thorpe, "Conrad and Caliban", ENCOUNTER, March 1986, pp. 43-51.

[6] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Continent of Circe* (Macmillan, 1967), p. 26.

[7] Chinweizu *et al.*, *Toward the Colonization of African Literature*, pp. 203, 237.

[8] Nadine Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum", *New York Review of Books*, 20 January 1983, pp. 21-29; *The Writer and Human Rights* (Lester Orpen Dennys, 1983); *A Sport of Nature* (New York, 1987).

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them think, such as, 'If you had been a British administrator in India, would you have let the natives under your governance burn the widow at the funeral of a man who had died?', they either remain silent or reply that the British should never have been there in the first place."

I wonder if Bloom countered this reaction by pointing out that Ram Mohun Roy, though himself a leading figure in the Hindu Reformation, defied ultra-conservative Hindus in supporting, for humanitarian reasons, British efforts to abolish suttee.

IRONICALLY, for attempts at balanced judgment of Empire and the values it brought (often in spite of itself), we must turn to certain Third World writers for whom those values remain a positive legacy. One such is Nirad C. Chaudhuri, who is concerned in his autobiography, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!*, to stress that the Raj was far from an unmitigated evil. While deploring the "racialist" behaviour of many British in India, he pleads for "historical judgment of British rule", affirming that:

". . . down to the beginning of the 20th century educated Indians could rise above their sense of humiliation at political subjection to admit that British rule had given them what no previous political régime had. Apart from peace and protection from blatant oppression . . . it had also emancipated their minds, so that they could turn to social and religious reform and cultural creation. . . . The awareness that happiness had a claim on human beings came to the Bengalis at first from their reading of English literature and observation of English life . . . ."

In "the actual state" of India today, he finds (as anyone may) "more maladministration, corruption and lawlessness than ever was seen . . . during British days"—and the same goes for "other regions of Asia and Africa".[9]

Even Chinua Achebe, the doughtiest defender of African dignity, was driven in *The Trouble With Nigeria* to exhort his countrymen to look West for salutary examples of public responsibility, self-denial and service: the very qualities of the better imperialist. One such was William Sleeman, whose tireless campaign to stamp out thuggee in India was distinguished, in a biographer's words, "by that remarkable readiness to serve that marked so many of the outstanding men of his time". Are we to dismiss such men, in Hannah Arendt's patronising phrase, as "the tragic and quixotic fools of imperialism"?[10] The tradition surely persists in the selfless devotion of European relief workers and the recent heroic example of the British surgeon, Pauline Cutting, in Beirut.

But although we may see in Chaudhuri and Achebe signs of movement toward a reappraisal of white influences, these are far from typical. "Decolonising the mind" remains an overriding concern, as in the Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's polemic of that title.[11] He argues for displacing English in favour of a common African language, appealing to the examples of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Dante as the founders of national literatures, supplanting the Latin dominance of the old Roman Empire. The analogy is a very loose one—not only Latin, but Graeco-Roman culture and thought lived on in, and beside, the evolving English language.

English literature deserves no less than Latin did the salutary status, and stimulus, of a classical literature. In his recent Inaugural Lecture at the University of Ibadan, provocatively entitled *In Praise of Alienation*, Abiola Irele rejects both a nostalgic cultural nationalism and an embracing of superficial Western material values, urging rather openness to those European values that might enhance African life. For him, the Roman analogy points to a potentially *beneficial* alienation whose selected advantages, rather than injuries, he stresses. Perhaps this attitude is too much, too soon to expect, but it should not be forgotten that during the freedom struggles—as Doris Lessing, once a dissident young white Rhodesian, has pointed out—the awakening of the subject peoples in the Empire was "very often fed by the generous age of British literature—poets like Shelley and Byron and Burns, writers like Dickens".[12]

PERHAPS THE MOST controversial Commonwealth writer is V. S. Naipaul. Wole Soyinka, interviewed after winning his Nobel Prize, derided him as the English literary Establishment's favourite candidate. Naipaul, who once too forthrightly said that he saw "no hope for Africa", has been accused of anti-black bias, but an intensive study of his work reveals rather a universal critique: of atrocity and corruption; cruelties and fanaticisms political and religious; social and cultural breakdown regardless of race or creed.

What must we think, by comparison, of Soyinka who, as President of the International Theatre Institute, had a stage adaptation of *Animal Farm* dropped from the Institute's Biennial Festival in 1986 to appease Soviet complaints—or who, in his Nobel Address of the same year simplistically exalted black values, alluding only in a cursory aside to "a few, renegade African leaders". Such evasions are a sad fall from grace in one who had courageously denounced African atrocities in his "The Writer in an African State" of twenty years before, during Nigeria's Civil War, and who had forewarned against idealising past African empires in his Independence play, *A Dance of the Forests*.[13]

In contrast, the West Indian poet Derek Walcott, who is of mixed blood, has boldly grasped the language which Empire deposited and has consistently refused to make colonialism a permanent all-embracing scapegoat for the ills of Independence:

[9] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921-1952* (Chatto & Windus, 1987), pp. 54, 155, 861-62.

[10] Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (Heinemann, 1983): see especially Chapter 7, "Indiscipline" (cf. the argument of Leo Katzen, "Africa's Man-Made Crisis", ENCOUNTER, May 1989). George Bruce, *The Stranglers* (London, 1968), p. 214; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (new ed., New York, 1973), p. 209.

[11] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind* (Heinemann, 1986).

[12] Doris Lessing, "A Small Personal Voice" in *Declaration*, ed. Tom Maschler (London, 1957), p. 24.

[13] I have discussed these points more fully in "Soyinka's Clay Foot", *World Literature Today*, Winter 1989.

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> "In the literature of the New World, servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature of recrimination and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters. . . . The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think of language as enslavement and who, in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence and nostalgia."

Later he regrets that "only the unsoiled black is valid . . . a writer of 'mixed', hence 'degenerate', blood can be nothing stronger than a liberal".[14] Is the Afro-Caribbean, of the negro, the only authentic Caribbean?

Ironically, the hypocrisy and self-righteousness thought so characteristically English now typify the spokesmen of the Third World;[15] the new situation is no healthier than the old. The imperialists' ethnocentricity is matched by the drummers of black superiority. How hollow now sounds Senghor's proud rhetoric: "Who else would teach rhythm to the world that has died of machines and cannons?"[16] Senghor has remained divided between the assimilationist *Francophonie* and the traditional African world: the first African to be made a member of the Académie Française, he keeps a flat in the Opéra district of Paris and has founded, at home, a university to research his ideas of a world culture.

The enduring flaw stems from polarised separation—of "us" and "them". The old moral imperialists kept their activities separate from those of their plundering fellows; today's black or aboriginal artists create myths of race, now and in the pre-colonial past, not only rejecting white values but idealising their own. Yet somehow values must be held as neither black nor white, "culture specific", but as desired universals.

This is especially evident in the Third World in the pervasive oppression (not merely inequality) of women, an issue already confronted by Ram Mohun Roy in the 1820s. Jomo Kenyatta, in *Facing Mt. Kenya* (1938), exalted clitoridectomy as a socially vital and beautiful rite of passage; later, the Mau Mau would maintain the necessity of girls' circumcision, reflecting a desire to defend Kikuyu traditions totally, a decision regretted by the African co-author of *Mau Mau from Within* (1970). In Canada today a male spokesman for the Indian Brotherhood proclaims, "It is our tradition and our culture if we want to discriminate against women". The Sudanese novelist Nuruddin Farah, in *From a Crooked Rib*

[14] Derek Walcott, "The Muse of History" in *Is Massa Day Dead?* (Doubleday, 1974), p. 19.

[15] Rajiv Gandhi's posture as critic of apartheid sorts oddly with his family's record in India: religious discrimination, sexism, bonded labour, and an "apartheid" caste system continue to breach that country's Constitution. The banning on publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988) bows to communal prejudice and serves, incidentally, as belated revenge for his satire on the Gandhi dynasty in *Midnight's Children* (1980).

[16] Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Prayer to Masks", *Modern Poetry from Africa*, ed. Moore and Beier (new ed., Penguin, 1970), pp. 53-54.

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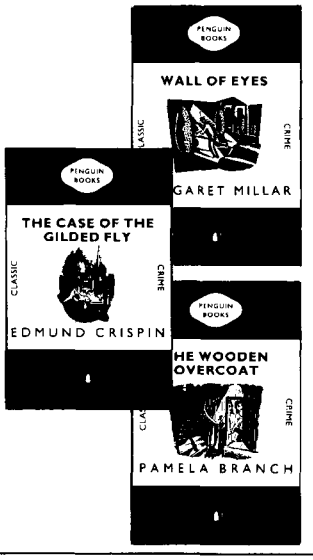

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(1970) has a Muslim wife reflect that clitoridectomy was "not only a painful but a barbaric act" and wonder "Are there people in the world who are not circumcised?" The late Bessie Head, a black writer passionately concerned with the condition of women, was anguished by "the dichotomy in traditional African life between humanity and cruelty".[17]

At issue here are the human and humane values that transcend radically entrenched positions. Truth-telling writers will always reach out for these. Wole Soyinka indeed affirmed this in his 1967 essay, pleading for "A historic vision" which "is of necessity universal".[18] Teachers, scholars and critics must similarly strive to maintain historic vision and to uphold values they believe in, whether or not they flatter certain nations or cultures, or their self-appointed drummers.

POSTSCRIPT: This text, with some variations, was delivered recently at an international conference on the New Literatures in English. The overwhelming, though not proclaimed, consensus of such a conference is anti-imperialistic; "the post-colonial" is pitted constantly and one-sidedly against "the master narrative" of colonial discourse. The general tendency is to serve what the late Shiva Naipaul, who saw enough of such conferences, denounced as "the lucrative dialogue between oppressed and former oppressor".[19] It is, rather, a monologue on such occasions, with chorus. One can cite exceptions, and make subtle distinctions, but only (to avoid further misunderstanding) at excessive length. However, one point must be made, which confirms the substance of my argument—that there must be a *dialogue*.

Two reactions to my paper were significant: some (not all) black participants labelled it "manipulative", despite my careful ground-clearing opening, and one, a woman apparently deaf to my paragraph on women's rights, demanded that I name *one* universal value. Outside the lecture hall, both immediately afterwards and during the next two days, several participants congratulated me on my "courage" in giving the paper. This was not, of course, the reaction I wanted. Most of these covert supporters were, alas, white; though a black West Indian, who had not been present at the lecture, asked to read the paper and said he did not find it objectionable. He would be dismissed by critical blacks as "Afro-Saxon". I have experienced something similar before.

Would not open support, in the lecture hall, have been preferable and led perhaps to a genuine dialogue? But this will not take place until one side can affirm that the colonial legacy is something more than a guilty burden, and the other acknowledge (with the authors I have cited here) that it is, for good as well as ill, a shared inheritance.

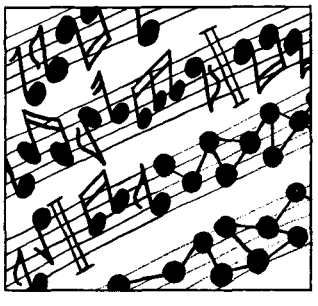
[17] Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (Monthly Review, 1970), pp. 121-22. Nuruddin Farah, *From a Crooked Rib* (Heinemann, 1970), p. 149. Bessie Head, "A Power Struggle", *Bananas* (London), 22 August 1980, p. 23.

[18] Wole Soyinka , "The Writer in an African State", *Transition* (Uganda), no. 31 (June-July 1967), p. 13, reprinted in *Art, Dialogue & Outrage* (Ibadan, 1981).

[19] Shiva Naipaul, *An Unfinished Journey* (London, 1986), p. 29.

Goodbye to Berlin

A Homage to Popular Song—By GEOFFREY HEPTONSTALL



THE DEATH OF Irving Berlin at 101 reminds us that it was always so much better only the day before yesterday, the time we cannot quite remember. This has been the mellow reflection through the ages, a part of youth's inheritance whereby optimism is tempered in experience. And so in the practical wisdom of everyday life the Fall is described in terms we can grasp. Surrealists, denying reality, had the gall to ridicule and abase the idea of *l'Age d'Or*. Romantics continue to believe they have known it, or have heard a true account of it. They may share that much with cynics. But romantics believe in what they hear.

Who would not believe in the popular song and dance music which emerged early in the century, derived from jazz, and which survives all the pervasive insistences of electronic rock? In the Beatles may be heard strong influences, not only in obvious pastiche. Even a disco queen may celebrate, however unworthily, George Gershwin.

There seems to be no generic name, except popular song, for the form which was carried across continents by electricity, but was never the slave of technology. It was too powerful, yet it lacks a specific identity except that of a handful of its masters. Their names are enough to convey at once the form itself and the occasion of its first hearing. We are at the movies watching Astaire and Rogers dance. Politics seems no more than structural hysteria. All life's certainties are threatened, but by love we survive the mid-century's madness. And the way we sing of love is what survives of us.

Jazz—Creole patois for the sexual act—began as the music of the poor who attended gentlemen at play. It was popularised as the art of the common people, and in its syncopations and its means of delivery was the definitive art of the machine age. Demotic ragtime had the grace of being the most sane of forces contending for the identity of a mass

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culture. For it attempted to change nothing, not even sensibilities. Its very commercialism enabled it to be itself, so elegant, so intelligent.

Show business has one concern—to satisfy the immediate and superficial needs of tired, or stupefied, or unlearned minds. It can be ephemeral. It can be loud, brash and vulgar. Most of it may be most of these things. But its primary advantage is its lack of self-consciousness. Sometimes an art is created in spite of itself. Cave-dwellers who painted walls celebrated real events. The cathedral masons praised God. The great popular arts were the work of skills put to other uses than the sensitive expression of self. The lasting value arises by chance, or, more likely, by some deeply-buried design which does not inhibit the surface form.

There is a body of feeling which says that much of the serious music of our times tries too hard to express itself. Its trials in the end say nothing significant, for they fail to touch ordinary experience. A body of informed thought will be aroused to deny this. I make no judgment here. What can be said is that the quantity of exceptional melody readily available has allowed the academies of music no course but to search for a new language. The possibility of there being these secret harmonies is beyond this occasion.

Irving Berlin lived (and died) to be lauded as a maker of art. No doubt he was embarrassed. Berlin and his contemporaries had too much genius for good tunes. It is an embarrassment for those who try to assess what has happened and how.

SPECULATING WHY a particular art occurs leads to attractive theories and ready wisdoms. But the truth is difficult. Benny Green in *Let's Face the Music*[1] makes the useful starting-point that the popular songwriters of the Golden Age were drawn from a wider range of backgrounds than is usually supposed. Cole Porter was neither Jewish, nor immigrant, nor poor. P. G. Wodehouse shared an Edwardian upper-middle-class education in London with another fabulist, Raymond Chandler. They exchanged their inheritance for the sophisticated underworld of the speakeasy, inventing a dialect by which a tribe was identified. It took an ambitious youth from the tradesman's entrance to provide the quintessential chic of their abandoned London which became Noël Coward's.

Boundaries of class and culture were crossed, but the immigrants were of no particular type. Several shared roots in Eastern European Jewry. It may be that the Slavonic element is the more decisive. Though it is generally assumed that Jewishness pervades the whole fact of being a Jew, there is nothing axiomatic about this. The secular America of ragtime probably freed the songwriters from a number of constraints of their given world. At the same time the wider landscapes may have allowed greater scope to proud affirmations of personal conscience.

The determining factor in practical terms seems to be that the popular songs were written usually as part of a show. Their subtleties are dramatic, as in *The Lady is a Tramp*, whose potential ambiguity Frank Sinatra used to such effect in the film of *Pal Joey*. *We're in the Money* has an obvious irony as part of a Depression movie, its pathos extended by its later use in *Bonnie and Clyde*. And the irony can work the other way. There is a forgotten song of the 1930s called *A Streetwalker Named Desire*.

It is customary to use rock music to accompany contemporary news-reels. The protest song made several reputations. But *Sing Me a Song of Social Significance* dates back to the New Deal. Green records a conversation with the author of *Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime?*, who told him that until that song was known, "there was no Depression". On reflection, the seeming arrogance of the remark soon diminishes, for poverty and economic crisis are not new unless their presence affects an entire society. Chaplin's tramp was outside society. The beggar of the song *was* that society, and he had built it.

Social relevance is not the only means a way of life expresses itself. The Gershwins did create a political satire as fresh now as 60 years ago. But it was the frankly-related, imaginatively-envisioned encounter with human love which transformed the Broadway show and its tunes into a higher achievement, the statement no one can deny.

Coward displayed considerable verve when he allowed Gertrude Lawrence her famous line about the strange potency of cheap music. Of course that comes in a straight play while a tune especially written for the piece plays in the background. The context suggests that Coward is claiming an equivalent status for his songs as for his drama. They are part of a single *oeuvre* (a point underlined by his choice of casting).

Since his critical work *The Reluctant Art* (1962), Benny Green has been a major commentator on jazz and popular music in Britain, deserving a reputation beyond these shores which is rarely accorded, although the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on jazz is his. He has practical experience as a librettist in jazz-opera and musical theatre, and earlier in dance bands as a saxophonist. His BBC radio show on popular music, like his prolific journalism, is unfailingly informative, while having the light touch of accessible interest. He writes, it should be added, on diverse areas, including a study of Wodehouse which combines his sensitivity to litera-

[1] *Let's Face the Music: The Golden Age of Popular Song*. By BENNY GREEN. Pavilion Books, £14.95.

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ture with his first love. He is able to consider song lyrics from experience as literary essayist. He rightly acknowledges Wodehouse's and Bolton's *Bring on the Girls* and its stature as a valuable account of practical experience in the theatre—one which is essential to an understanding of the Broadway of those years.

Green adds his own contribution—for the book is in part a memoir of encounters with the masters. He has distilled decades of broadcast material, articles and essays into this single testament. The fine balance between the casualness of conversation and the serious evaluation of the critic is a formidable achievement. The style resembles Sinatra in performance—seemingly effortless yet really a work of great care. Given Green's high regard for Sinatra, that allusion is appropriate. Certainly he has realised that one dare not be dull when writing about charm, or classically elegant about demotic vitality.

The need to offer homage to the Broadway masters acquires a certain urgency on reflection of several hostilities. It is not the mechanical idiocy of Muzak which is so alarming. Far more destructive has been the use of the Gene Kelly version of *Singin' in the Rain* in *Clockwork Orange*, for a very pertinent example. In the 1960s a pop group called "Harper's Bazaar" made a respectful and lovely version of *Anything Goes*. It was a success. Then it was used in a gay movie—a loud, brash and bitchy affair. Cole Porter had written a plea for discretion and romance, a modern exemplar of an ancient tradition by no means debased by Broadway, for Porter's lyrics are equal to any Provençal troubadour's *aubade*.

Against this there have been some welcome acts of homage by rock 'n' rollers. From Elvis Presley's early recording of *Blue Moon* in 1956 to the Bronski Beat's *It Ain't Necessarily So* in 1985, there exist versions of the old masters which affirm their rightness about human feeling. The versions cited above may be considered definitive.

Such graces would have saved the world from the Flood. We may feel, tentatively, that our times are not beyond redemption. What survives of our century may be, in part, its songs.

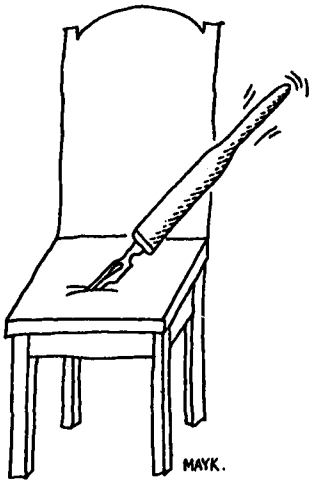
Every Time the Evidence Breaks Down

René Char, 1907-88—By Mark Hutchinson

"Quand on a mission d'éveiller, on commence par faire sa toilette dans la rivière. . . ."
(When one's mission is to awaken others, one begins by cleansing oneself in the river. . . .)

"A chaque effondrement des preuves le poète répond par une salve d'avenir."
(Every time the evidence breaks down the poet responds with a volley of the future.)

René Char



It is almost a commonplace that poetry builds outwards from the heart of our quarrels and contradictions—and, from Jacob in his original labours to the strenuous angels of Rilke, no figure has been more suggestive of the poet than that of the wrestler locked in a nightlong struggle to become. Yet for a variety of reasons, some of them excellent, we tend to shroud the poet in any number of polite fictions, one of the most persistent of which is that struggles of this kind are essentially private. Our literatures, however, are there, and quietly deny this; for, as Guy Davenport has observed, "*objective* and *subjective* are modes in the critic's mind; the poet scarcely knows what they mean".[1]

Aware that what is of concern to the poet is necessarily of importance to the community, but that books, by their very nature, are addressed to publics of one, René Char conducted his life and work accordingly. The summer of 1987, for instance, saw him in his eightieth year. Apart from the appearance of one or two previously unpublished poems and a few studies of his work, celebrations were resolutely low-key: a homage here, a concert there, plus a cassette of the poet reading; but no interviews, no public appearance, no *Festschrift*. A king in hiding in the landscape of French poetry, Char, like Flaubert's artist, was everywhere present but nowhere visible.[2]

He was also that rare thing in a country as intellectually sectarian as France, a poet whose work was universally admired. A list of those who, in one form or another, acknowledged his achievement across three generations includes Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Albert Camus, Paul Celan, André du Bouchet, Dominique Fourcarde, Christian Guez Ricord, Edmond Jabès, Octavio Paz,

[1] Guy Davenport, *The Geography of the Imagination* (Picador, 1984), p. 191.

[2] Recent books by or about Char include the posthumous *Eloge d'une Soupçonnée* (Gallimard, 1988); *La Postérité Du Soleil* (Editions de l'Aire, 1986), a trade reprint of photographs of the Vaucluse by Henriette Grindat with texts by Camus and a postface by Char; Gabriel Bounoure, *René Char, Céreste et la Sorgue* (Fata Morgana, 1987); Christine Dupouy, *René Char* (Belfond, 1987); and Serge Velay, *René Char* (La Manufacture, 1987); and Philippe Castellin, *René Char, Traces* (Editeurs les Evidant, 1989).

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Saint-John Perse, James Wright and William Carlos Williams. And this is only a random sampling among writers: it mentions neither the galaxy of painters or *alliés substantiels* with whom he collaborated throughout his life, nor that *cortège* of devoted readers who wrote to pay their respects in the back pages of *Libération* in 1988.

There are many reasons for the near-legendary status Char enjoyed in France. Not all have to do with his poetry, but foremost among those that do must be the sheer inventiveness with which, throughout the 60 years of his writing life, he never ceased to confront the double enigma of Who we are and Who we should become. As Auden—his exact contemporary—remarked, any poetry that aims at being a clarification of life must address itself to these questions to which all men, whether or not they read poetry, seek a response.[3]

The relation between the two is, by now, an old and troubled one. Guillaume Apollinaire voiced it as a playful distich in *Le Pont Mirabeau*—

Comme la vie est lente
Et comme l'Espérance est violente

How slow life is
How violent is hope

—and in the case of most French poetry at least since Baudelaire it would be possible to draw up a graph of the modulations-in-response to which it has given rise. Each of these (Rimbaud's flight into Africa to operate "directly" on his life; Mallarmé's "*Où fuir dans la révolte inutile et perverse?*" and his gradual apotheosis of "*le Livre*"; Valéry's subordination of the written fruits to the inner transformations which the act of writing allows) can be seen as a more or less anguished attempt at transcending that basic conflict. And each is markedly private.

The book that first brought Char to the attention of a more general public was *Seuls Demeurent*, a collection published in the wake of World War II, and the first to appear under the Gallimard imprint. Though scarcely his début as a poet, it gave particularly coherent finish to a pattern that was to become increasingly characteristic of his major publications: poems in verse, poems in prose, and the aphorisms which serve to illuminate the foundations of his work. With the appearance of his Resistance manuscript *Feuillets d'Hypnos* in 1946 and *Fureur et mystère* a few years later, it was clear to many that a prince of poets was once more in their midst. Char had become Char.

Prior to that, however, he had been René Char, Surrealist (second wave) in his twenties and, in more tragic guise, Capitaine Alexandre during the Occupation. Each of these two periods was significant for the kind of poet he was to become.

René Char was 22 when he joined the Surrealist movement, under the tutelage of Paul Eluard, and whatever misgivings he may later have felt over some of its orientations, he was never very far from it in aims and inspiration. Heraclitus and Rimbaud, figures to whom the Surrealists accorded a special pre-eminence, take on a highly personal colouring throughout Char's work. Likewise, he put to particularly good use the aphoristic mode popular among Surrealist writers in the 1930s. It is on a more general plane, however, that the influence was most marked, for it was above all in his allegiance to an exacting and somewhat hieratic vision of poetry that he remained closest to Surrealist principles.

For André Breton, the known and the unknown were *vases communicantes* that together made up the real, and articulation of that "real" the artist's principal concern. To put one's talent at the service of anything less was not merely to court triviality: it was also to help perpetuate the forces of degradation in life. "*La médiocrité de notre univers*", wrote Breton, "*ne dépend-elle pas essentiellement de notre pouvoir d'énonciation*? (Does not the mediocrity of our universe depend essentially on our powers of formulation?)"[4] A poem, therefore, was not so much an object as an event; and, inasmuch as it was successful, a significant one, with an impact on our lives analogous in kind to that of any cardinal encounter.[5]

Char soon realised, however, that to produce work that lived up to this ideal was infinitely harder than Surrealism, with its nervous effervescence and endless group manoeuverings, allowed for. When he left the group, he did so for reasons both political and aesthetic: Surrealism, he felt, was heading straight for "*la Maison de Retraite des Belles-Lettres et de la Violence réunies*". Or, as he put it in another text from the same period:

> "*Toute une production qui de nos jours s'estime l'héritière des grands voyants du Moyen Age et du XIX^e siècle ne tardera pas à découvrir son destin sur les épaules de ce congédié: l'artificialisme.*"
>
> "Any number of works which today see themselves as the successors to the great seers of the Middle Ages and the 19th century will soon discover their destiny on the shoulders of that unwanted quantity: artificialism."[6]

CHAR'S TIME IN THE *Maquis* is more difficult to assess. Though he made very few direct references to it in his work, it forms part of the legend that, for better or for worse, began to build up around his name in the years after the War. For once, however, the legend seems justified.

> "*Certes* [he wrote to a friend in 1941] *il faut écrire des poèmes. . . . mais tout ne doit pas se borner là. Ce serait dérisoirement insuffisant.*"
>
> "One must certainly write poems . . . but everything should

---

[3] W. H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand* (Faber, 1963), pp. 344-45.

[4] André Breton, *Introduction au Discours sur le Peu de Réalité* Gallimard, 1927).

[5] W. H. Auden makes a similar point in "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" when he explicitly rejects the idea that poetry makes anything happen, preferring to see poetry as, in itself, "A way of happening, a mouth".

[6] The quotations from Char are too numerous to allow noting in full. The majority come from works collected in the four volumes of the Gallimard/Poésie series; the remainder from individual volumes of the later work, notably *Fenêtres dormantes et porte sur le toit* (1979). The English translations are my own.

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not stop there. That would be pitiably insufficient."

Out of this conviction grew the wartime persona of Capitaine Alexandre, sector head for parachute drops in the Basses-Alpes, and a figure of some consequence in the history of the French Resistance.

The bearing this has on his work is more than merely biographical. Time and again, Char returns to the notion of poetry as a source of enlightenment; and it soon becomes clear that the term is generally synonymous in his mind with a certain "fine-tuning" of life. If poetry proper is its ultimate manifestation, this is by no means the only form it can take. The Resistance for Char, one suspects, was not only a *devoir* but a test of the poet's *techne* or *nous*. He came through it particularly well, with a minimum loss of lives and materials, and his own humanity, to the astonishment and delight of William Carlos Williams among others, remained fundamentally intact.

The terms in which a former companion-in-arms concluded his *témoignage* bears out this view:

> ". . . *Char était d'ailleurs particulièrement à l'aise dans les situations inattendues et surtout insolites; il semblait les affectionner, sans doute à cause de son caractère propre de poète. Peut-être est-ce parce que, survenant avec la rapidité de l'éclair, ces situations appelaient une réponse-éclair et excluaient toute compromission. Sans des poètes qui font relais et transmettent la vie, je crois que la vie se perdrait.*"
>
> "Char, moreover, was particularly at ease in unexpected and above all unfamiliar situations; he seemed to have a fondness for them, doubtless on account of his particular make-up as a poet. This was perhaps because, coming about with the rapidity of lightning, such situations required a lightning response that made compromise impossible. Without poets around to relay and transmit life, life would die out, I think."[7]

With the exception of *Feuillets d'Hypnos*, direct reference to this period of his life is rare: a few pages at the beginning of *Recherche de la base et du sommet* (1955) pay homage to various friends who died in the struggle, and attempt a stock-taking of it all. Declining to sit in judgment, and noting his scorn for the eleventh-hour "*poignée de petits fauves réclamant la curée d'un gibier qu'ils n'avaient pas chassé* (handful of lesser game crying out for a quarry they had not hunted down)", Char stated his view:

> "*Nous sommes partisans, après l'incendie, d'effacer les traces, de murer le labyrinthe et de relever le civisme.*"
>
> "We are in favour of removing the traces once the fire is over; of walling up the labyrinth and restoring the notion of good citizenship."

Thereafter, as Char was always at pains to point out, his private life was largely his own affair. He continued to have his say on certain issues, but always with a healthy disregard for the overtly political and the fashionable aside. He took various stands as a contributor to Camus's *Combat* until the early 1950s, and in 1966-67 lobbied with Picasso and others against the installation of nuclear missiles on the Plateau d'Albion in Provence. Allusions to totalitarianism can likewise be found throughout his post-War work, and in a late volume of translations, more than half of which come from the Russian, the governing presence is conspicuously that of Mandelstam. Yet it is typical of his scrupulousness in such matters that he did not take at all kindly to an interviewer's attempts to secure from him an outright condemnation of Communism. For all his antique pessimism, one doubts that he was ever seriously tempted by despair.

Apart from the fact that his poetry is not available in English, his work is notoriously to discuss, for in the kind of poetry he wrote is, to a quite remarkable degree, the concretion of a force. To understand just what is at stake in it, we must understand its system of values and metaphysics; and this is where the difficulties begin.

Char's mastery of the infernal science of contraries is so fine that to pull on one thread is immediately to have four or five others on your hands. Not only is Freedom married to Responsibility, Justice to Order, Generosity to Disinterestedness, Indignation to Conscience, and so forth; each of these complementary unities exists within a kinship system whereby discussion of any one set invites reference to all. The mind at work in his poems was once compared to the "vertical equilibrium" of a person walking and the image is a good one: for its continuity was anything but static.

Auden once wrote that two questions interested him when reading a poem. One was technical. (Here is a verbal contraption. How does it work?) The other, in the broadest sense, was moral. (What kind of person inhabits this poem? What is his or her idea of the Great Good Place?)[8]

At first sight, that order of priorities might seem shocking. Surely the values which a poem embodies are of more importance to us than its mechanics? In poetry, however, values and techniques are inseparable; and though character in the long run is of more use to a writer than talent alone, making a poem that is even remotely commensurate with "reality" is as delicate and demanding an activity as any sustained conversion of principle into practice.

There are two basic reasons for this. The first is that a poem is not so much a statement of beliefs—an essentially passive activity requiring no great personal investment on the part of either writer or reader—as a tissue of relations that enables us to gauge for ourselves, with all the risks this entails, the quality of a writer's understanding. Or, as Char once put it: "*l'outil-roi n'existe qu'en vol* (the kingly instrument exists only in flight)".

The second (and more disturbing) of the two reasons is that the deepest truths, those without which we would scarcely be able to tie our shoes in the morning, are rendered all but impotent by virtue of being universally admitted: they have become so integral to our field of vision that much of the time we simply cease to see them.

For an "armed" poet like Char, one of whose main con-

[7] *René Char* (Cahiers de L'Herne, 1971), p. 206.

[8] See W. H. Auden, "Making, Knowing and Judging", in *The Dyer's Hand*, pp. 50-51.

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cerns was to keep our understanding of such truths active and intimate, this poses all kinds of problems. Not only must he "make it new"; he must do so, if his weighing of words is to have any value at all, in such a way that the reader comes away from his work "a changed man". That Char succeeded in this as often as he did is the measure of his achievement. For the sake of clarity, however, I propose to begin with Auden's second question. What kind of person inhabits these poems, and what does his ethic involve?

ALTHOUGH VERY LITTLE of Char's work runs to more than three or four pages, everything else about it is massive, abundant. Whatever the governing temper, it is nothing if not absolute. His belief was that unless a poet pours everything he possesses into his work, and in the most scrupulous and exacting manner possible, he might just as well never have begun. The rest—his failings, the moments of vanity and inertia—have no place on the page. "*On ne partage pas ses gouffres avec autrui, seulement ses chaises* (One never shares one's gulfs with others, only one's chairs)." A poet, after all, has "*toutes les rues de la vie oublieuse pour distribuer ses moyennes aumônes et cracher le petit sang dont il ne meurt pas*. (A poet has all the streets of forgetful life in which to distribute his modest alms and spit out the morning-blood he will not die of.)"

This separation of roles goes a long way with Char. To demand of life what can be fully achieved only in art is to starve both, and much of his work can be read as a reflection on the confusion and cruelty that arise when people fail to distinguish in what ways the two are united and in what ways distinct. Art he saw as a revitalising force grounded in a passionate respect for the entire creation and informing its environment accordingly. Equally, he knew that, for a whole complex of reasons, society cannot come near this:

> "*Il ne saurait y avoir de poésie ou de vie sans espoir—poésie: espoir extrême; existence: espoir relatif.*"
>
> "There can be no poetry or life without hope—poetry: extreme hope; existence; relative hope."

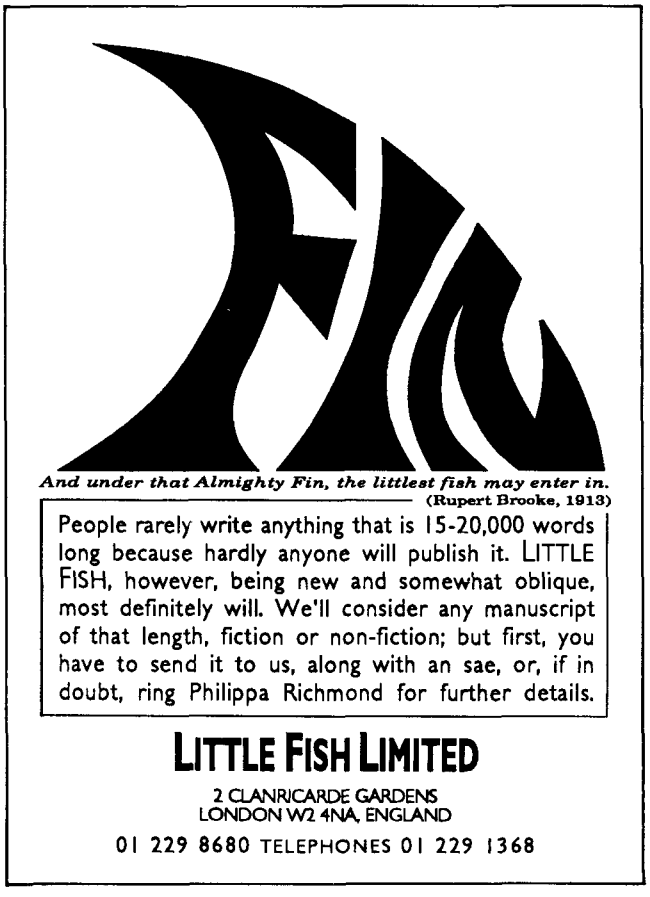
Char was not, of course, suggesting that a line be drawn through what Pound once called "the outrageous hopes of one's youth"; rather, that the failure of our good derives not only from indolence and greed but also from our tendency to undermine the complementary relation between art and life precisely by misconstruing the *kind* of distinction that is the condition of their being united. "*Le poète doit rosser son aigle aussi bien que sa grenouille s'il ne veut pas gâter sa lucidité* (The poet must thrash his eagle and his frog alike, if he does not wish to spoil his lucidity)", one aphorism observes, thereby reminding us both that clarity of vision depends on successfully harnessing conflicting forces and that the forces involved cease to be significant the moment they move outside that triangle. In Char's highly structured universe, things both define and are defined by one another, much as in Shakespeare's *Pericles* a just order is conceived in terms of an organic hierarchy where the king himself (I.ii.30) is

> *. . . no more but as the tops of trees,*
> *Which fence the roots they grow by and defend them.*

Char's vision, therefore, is at once aristocratic (the poet, he says, privileged to stand guard over man's troubled unity, must "bow down only to love"), democratic (all must be free to choose and none obliged), and egalitarian (no link in the chain is so small as to be unworthy of the poet's love; for, as Kenneth Cox has observed, "to the egalitarian intellect one thing is as good as another so long as it differs from everything else"[9]).

As for Char's vision of the Great Good Place, it would probably be as plausible and anachronistic as that of most poets. The city is to all intents and purposes absent from his work. When a community is invoked, its setting tends to be animal, vegetable and mineral in about equal quantities, with culture, as what man makes of the world, never too far distant from what man does with the earth: both are the fruits of love and cunning.

It would be wrong, however, to deduce from this that Char was indifferent to the world in which most of us, most of the time, have to live: he merely suspected that to ask that poems be made in the image of our lives is symptomatic of a certain complacency. Nor was he a prisoner of that utilitarianism which sees Nature *only* in terms of Spring; for


And under that Almighty Fin, the littlest fish may enter in.
(Rupert Brooke, 1913)
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[9] Kenneth Cox, "Hugh McDiarmid's Neoplatonism", in *Agenda*, vol. 5, No. 4 and vol. 6, no. 1 (1967-68).

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one of the themes that recurs throughout his work is that of our right *not* to produce. As the poem "*Qu'il vive!*" in *Les Matinaux* (1950) puts it:

> "*Il y a des feuilles, beaucoup de feuilles sur les arbres de mon pays. Les branches sont libres de n'avoir pas de fruits.*"
>
> "There are leaves, many leaves on the trees of my native region. The branches are free not to bring forth fruit."

"Every honest man is a prophet" wrote Blake, and continued: "he utters his opinion both of private & public matters. Thus: If you go on So, the result is So. He never says, such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer, not an Arbitrary Dictator."[10]

For Blake, a human being is sacred but not a god: he has the power to look about him and observe laws; to converse with Isaiah in the Strand, if that is his pleasure, or have dead kings come sit for him in his studio at night. (The imagination is at home anywhere those laws are celebrated—preferably without too much fuss and piety.)

What Blake would have us understand, no doubt, is that though a deity is not an Arbitrary Dictator a human being is likely to become one, should he start mistaking himself for a god. And Char would agree: "*N'étant jamais définitivement modelé, l'homme est receleur de son contraire.* (Never definitively formed, man is the keeper of his contrary.)"

An awareness of the future as something dormant within the present (the figure suggested is very much that of a woman with child), and in some sense its guarantor, is everywhere in Char. Seeking to elucidate just what kind of "forward speech" is involved, Maurice Blanchot distinguished three kinds, which may be summarised as follows:[11]

(*a*) that of the prophet as lightning-rod for the divine, where what is announced is as often as not characterised by violence and intolerance (the prophet of the fundamentalist and Blake's Arbitrary Dictator);

(*b*) that of Rimbaud's *voyant*, with its deliberate disruption of the language;

(*c*) and that of Char, a "*serment de l'avenir*" or swearing-in of the future, that is not so much *voyant* as *pré-voyant*.

A good deal of information is contained in that prefix, *pré-*. To begin with, it underlines both Char's kinship with Rimbaud—who wrote in his "*lettre dite du Voyant*" of "*l'oeuvre, c'est à dire la pensée chantée et comprise du chanteur* (the lifework, that is to say a body of sung thought understood by the singer)"[12]—and his substantial divergence (the prefix relieves "*voyant*" of its mystical connotations, and reminds us that the imaginative faculty is shared by all in the more familiar guise of foresight).

It also draws attention to Char's predilection for beginnings, whether he is standing in the great gallery at Lascaux, brooding on his much-cherished Heraclitus, or simply celebrating daybreak and the infinite resourcefulness of spring. "*Seule est émouvante l'orée de la connaissance* (The outskirts of knowledge alone are truly moving)", he tells us, from which it follows that the worst thing that can befall us is to find satisfaction once and for all in some particular system:

> "*La perte du croyant, c'est de rencontrer son église. Pour notre dommage, car il ne sera plus désormais fraternel* par le fond."
>
> "The downfall of the man of faith is to have found his church. The loss is ours, for he will never again be fraternal *at heart*."

Char's leading intuition, then, is that on our capacity to inaugurate promising environments, or "counter-realities", depends the keenness of our present lives and our success in carrying that same quality on into the future. Again and again, the image which he presents is that of a gardener preparing his terrain:

> "*L'arracher à sa terre d'origine. Le replanter dans le sol présumé harmonieux de l'avenir, compte tenu d'un succès inachevé. . . .*"
>
> "Uproot it from its native soil. Plant it afresh in what you presume to be the harmonious soil of the future, having taken into account the partial nature of success. . . ."

A little earlier in the same group he remarks of an observation he has just made:

> "*Coupons cette branche. Aucun essaim ne viendra s'y pendre.*"
>
> "Cut down this branch. No swarm will come and hang from it."

However much this faculty may have been travestied on the political and collective plane, George Steiner has argued with great vigour and conviction in *After Babel* that man's capacity to cast nets "in rivers north of the future" (the image is Paul Celan's) is what has allowed him both literally and figuratively to come to grips with the world. There is a passage in that work that is worth quoting in full, for the light it throws on Char's "handling" of the future:

> "The necromancer, the witch at Endor, claim to decipher God's hidden purpose instead of reading His manifest will. The relation of the genuine prophet (*nabi*) to the future is, in the classic period of Hebrew feeling, unique and complex. It is one of 'evitable' certitude. Inasmuch as he merely transmits the word of God, the prophet cannot err. His uses of the future of the verb are tautological. The future is entirely present to him in the literal presentness of his speech-act. But at the same moment, and this is decisive, his enunciation of the future makes that future alterable. If man repents and changes his conduct, God can bend the arc of time out of foreseen shape. There is no immutability except His being. The force, the axiomatic certainty of the prophet's prediction lies precisely in the possibility that the prediction will go unfulfilled. From Amos to Isaiah, the true prophet 'does not

[10] William Blake, *Complete Writings* (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 392.

[11] See Maurice Blanchot, *La Bête de Lascaux* (Fata Morgana, 1982), pp. 29-33.

[12] Rimbaud, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Gallimard, 1972), p. 249f.

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> announce an immutable decree. He speaks into the power of the moment, and in such a way that his message of disaster just touches this power'."[13]

Bearing in mind Steiner's rider that this relation to the future is unique to the classic period of Hebrew feeling, the phenomenon he is describing is close in a number of vital respects to that which we find in Char. Anyone familiar with Char's work will know that one of its most persistent achievements is its welding of vigilance with exaltation: like Blake, Char had no time at all for the notion of poet as fortune-teller, with its sinister appeal to the fatalist and its Faustian presumption. To claim to know the *actual* future is to abdicate both free will and responsibility and, in Steiner's terms, to presume "to decipher God's hidden purpose instead of reading His manifest will". (Char makes exactly this distinction in one of his later pieces, *Picasso Sous Les Vents Etésiens*, when he writes: "*Le sorcier abuse, le magicien mesure.*")

What all three have in common—Steiner's "*nabi*", Blake's "Every honest man", and Char's "*prévoyant*"—is that they address not some actual future but "the power of decision lying in the moment". Here is Char's way of describing this:

> "*Les grands prévoyants précèdent un climat, parfois le fixent, mais ne devancent pas les faits. Ils peuvent tout au plus, les déduisant de ce climat, crayonner les contours de leur fantôme et, s'ils ont scrupule, par anticipation, les flétrir. . . .*"
>
> "The great foreseers precede a climate, sometimes determine it, but never run on ahead of the facts. At most, they can, by deducing them from that climate, sketch out the contours of their phantom, and if they are scrupulous, stigmatise them in advance. . . ."

What is striking here is Char's choice of the word "*crayonner*". Cave-paintings exist that appear to have been pelted with missiles of some kind, and one of the theories that has been advanced to explain this fact is that the animal depicted, by being brought down ritually beforehand, would be that much more vulnerable when it came to the actual hunt. What such a process may be thought to overcome is not so much the animal itself as the fears of the hunter; and whether or not Char had something of that kind in mind when writing the passage, here, as throughout his work, there is clearly a ritual coherence at play. A gesture is made towards the future as a means of assuming responsibility for the present so that, having sketched the phantom as best he can, the *prévoyant* is prepared for the worst, as it were, and that much more capable of combating it should it in fact materialise. This, I think, is why for Char good always has the upper hand over evil in the long run. For if "we", as he puts it in one aphorism, are vulnerable, we are less so than "*nos agresseurs qui, s'ils ont le crime, n'ont pas le second souffle* (our aggressors, though they have crime on their side, have no second wind)"; or, as he puts it in another piece, "*nos atouts sont perpétuels* (our trumps are perpetual)".

Where the utilitarian mind must be forever laying out cadavers on the anatomist's table, poetry, we know, would have us come at the world "entire". Its concern is not so much with things as with the relations between them; less with words and facts than with what Bunting called "words that name facts dancing together".

Ruskin believed that "the great artists were those who had never despised anything, however small, of God's making",[14] and one of the functions of art consists in the sureness with which it speaks to us of the integrity of the world. What else do we have to protect ourselves from ourselves, and from that species of folly which tends to identify the instruments we use (terms, ideas, systems, artefacts) with the very matter of existence itself? The act of writing a poem, Joseph Brodsky observed, involves an extraordinary acceleration of consciousness; so, when all goes well, will the act of reading one.[15]

CHAR'S WAY of confronting us with the whole, his *style* when it is at its most consubstantial, so to speak, with reality ("*le poète*", he wrote, "*doit porter le poème sur toute sa personne*"), is one of the glories of French poetry. Predictably, it has been accused of being hermetic—a charge that is misleading in the extreme, for with it comes a suggestion that his poem must somehow be broken open before they can cast their spell. What actually happens is quite the reverse; a typical piece will begin by overwhelming one with the whole, and then, little by little, invite more detailed examination.

What it will not do is lay itself open to a certain kind of systematic analysis. But to complain of this is to misconstrue the very essence of Char's art. He wrote in one love-poem:

> *Chacun de nous peut recevoir*
> *La part de mystère de l'autre*
> *Sans en répandre le secret;*
>
> *Each of us can receive*
> *The other's share of mystery*
> *Without divulging its secret*

In order to effect this delicate exchange he evolved a language that is both highly allusive and deeply appealing.

Quite what happens in a Char poem can be hard to pin down, but this is not necessarily because of carelessness on the author's part. In one prose-poem, a friend's book is described as a field of rye, and as a world where "*l'âme circulante du hérisson* (the hedgehog's mobile soul)" can come into its own. As an image it could hardly be more eloquent: a poem, a book, a work of art is a closely cultivated terrain where a vulnerable but heavily protected creature can go about undisturbed. What that creature is he does not say, though one may notice that the hedgehog appears earlier on in the same collection in association with "*La Conscience*". If a poem is at once creature and environment, then the close organisation it entails must likewise be double: hence the echo of the hedgehog's quills in the field of rye.

Consider also that astonishing phrase "*l'âme circulante du*

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[13] George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 146-47.

[14] The description is A. S. Byatt's in *Sugar* (Chatto & Windus, 1987).

[15] See Joseph Brodsky, "*Discours de réception*", in *Libération* (9 December 1987).

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hérisson". Given that it is impossible to name a hedgehog without having immediately in one's mind's eye a creature that is all body, Char has effectively forced on us an absolute identification of body and soul. The hedgehog's body *is* the hedgehog's soul. (Simile's are rare in Char's work). The poem's form is a concretion of the poet's vision, the body it becomes. Fusion, in fact, is the hallmark of Char's work; and if, like many poets, he was at once poet, essayist, moralist and metaphysician, what is unique in his case is the degree to which the four orders function as one. They frequently govern the very wording of a line, as though he had led them back to a common origin: one is reminded of Blake's description of speech as the Parent Sense.

An idea of just how much is at stake in this operation can be had by considering what Char had to say about Heraclitus:

> "*Héraclite est, de tous, celui qui, se refusant de morceler la prodigieuse question, l'a conduite aux gestes, à l'intelligence et aux habitudes de l'homme sans en atténuer le feu, en interrompre la complexité, en compromettre le mystère, en opprimer la juvénilité. . . .*"
>
> "It is Heraclitus, more than anyone, who, by refusing to divide the prodigious question, has introduced it into the gestures, intelligence and practices of man, without attenuating its fire, interrupting its complexity, compromising its mystery, or oppressing its youthfulness. . . ."

The qualities Char identifies in Heraclitus throw light on his own practices. "*La prodigieuse question*" presumably concerns that truth he describes a few lines earlier as the "*meneuse d'absolu*"; and what Char sought in his work, therefore, was to carry that enigma over into our lives without sacrificing any of its aspects.

"DE LA SAINTE FAMILLE *au Droit à la paresse*" is a tribute to Wifredo Lam, written in 1976. Like many of the pieces Char wrote for painters, it seeks to articulate the struggle in which a painter is engaged, and studiously avoids that kind of technical criticism which tends to tell us everything about a painting except the essential: what is the role it plays in our lives? The danger in this approach, of course, is that the poet ends by appropriating the painter's work to his own concerns; but at its best it will give us work like Rilke's letters on Cézanne; and friends of Wifredo Lam are said to find in Char's *hommage* a remarkable "likeness".

To begin with, the rather bizarre title tells us that what will follow is concerned with two principles: that of the holy family (the title appears in lower case suggesting that, whatever that "family" might be, it will have nothing to do with Rome) and of the right to idleness. Like many Char titles, it sets up two complementary terms which will help orient our reading of the text, just as the text will throw light back on the movement described in the title.

Char opens by evoking the apparently commonplace manner in which he first discovered "*le monde des faits accomplis de Wifredo Lam*" in a Paris gallery in the 1940s: called inside, he finds himself before two canvases where, amid a "*violent et lancinant arôme de forêts*", certain figures are trying to make an appearance. The colours of the paintings, we are told, recalled those of Picasso and Braque in their Cubist period:

> ". . . *surtout de Picasso, paradoxalement, lui, le maître du tordage, imperméable à l'humidité fertilisante dont rêvent les formes végétales ou mentales libres.*"
>
> ". . . above all, paradoxically, of Picasso, that master of wrenched twisted form, impermeable to the fertilising moistures of which free-floating vegetal and mental forms dream."

Notice how he has drawn our attention to a quality in Lam's work by proxy, as it were, by telling us what Picasso was *not* receptive to. The scene then shifts abruptly: Char, 48 hours later, is crossing "*le plateau des Claparèdes dans le Luberon*" by night. The footpath he has taken leads out into a cornfield and a chorus of "*grillons stridulants*":

> "*Isolés, les insectes eussent été insupportables, rassemblés, ils formaient au ras du sol une nappe aérienne qui sous les étoiles printanières n'en finissait pas de s'étendre, d'occuper musicalement le ciel dans son métamorphisme. . . .*"
>
> "Isolated from one another, the insects would have been unbearable; assembled together at ground level they constituted an airy film that continued to radiate out under the April stars, investing the sky with music in its metamorphoses. . . ."

This sets Char thinking momentarily about politics, and prompts the dismissive "*Mon siècle de gribouilles nationalistes n'avait qu'à bien se tenir!* (My century, with its nationalist simpletons, would be in for a shock!)".

Thus far, then, we have had an opening that has warned us that whatever high jinks Lam might appear to be up to on the canvas, his world is fundamentally one of "*faits accomplis*"; a suggestion, full of promise, of human life coming to birth amid a "*humidité fertilisante*"; and a picture of an insect community in perfect harmony with the night. The first image of a "*sainte famille*"? At all events, one in comparison with which the various nationalist tendencies of the 20th century seem pitifully wide of the mark.

Char next turns his attention once more to Lam, and it is at this point that the text proper may be said to begin:

> ". . . *je songeais à Lam, au berceau forestier que sa peinture m'avait désigné l'avant-veille comme étant celui de sa longue famille écartelée dont j'ignorais les visages ascendants. Famille dépouillée, par de périodiques cyclones, de ses pauvres biens. Famille dont Lam, avec raffinement et subtilité, avait peint le bouclier dans la personne successive des arbres derrière lesquels se tenait, en même temps qu'une touffeur d'orage, l'espace futur d'une lutte de libération. Action à sans cesse remettre à une meilleure place. . . .*"
>
> ". . . I thought of Lam, of the woodsman's cradle that, two days previously, his paintings had revealed to me as being that of his long-standing and scattered family; a family whose foremost members were unknown to me. A

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family that periodic cyclones had stripped of its modest belongings. A family whose shield Lam had painted with refinement and subtlety as a successive embodiment of trees, behind which could be found, as well as the intensity of a storm, the future space in which a struggle for freedom could be engaged. An action that has constantly to be improved on. . . ."

What Lam's painting has done, it appears, is indicate the origins from which the painter and his "family" have been cut off. It is cyclones or forces of nature that are responsible for these periodic acts of dispossession—which is Char's way of saying that in order to combat such phenomena with any hope of success we must first of all accept that they are not things over which we have, or should even aspire to have, absolute control. (nothing is ever either pure or impure, but is a mixture in a constant state of "*devenir*", is a major theme throughout his work.)

THE FAMILY, then, has been stripped of its heritage; and Lam's first act, for Char, is to paint their shield, as in a coat-of-arms—though we might also remember that Char once evoked the alliance between poet and painter (on that occasion Nicholas de Staël) in terms of Patroclus and Achilles, bound to one another by affection and a common cause. That "shield" takes the form of a "*personne successive des arbres*" (strange formula: as though each tree is simply one in a series by which some larger tree is unfolding, as in an *arbre généologique*); and behind it can be found "*l'espace futur d'une lutte de libération*" along with that close, charged atmosphere that precedes a storm. The "action" in which Lam is engaged, therefore, has constantly to be revised, and the paragraph comes to a close on a rather enigmatic quotation from a 19th-century writer, Jules Lequier:

> "*Cette branche cache une plaie sanglante. Cette plaie, c'est la férocité. Cette branche est grosse de férocité.*"
>
> "This branch conceals a bleeding wound. The wound is ferocity. This branch is ripe with ferocity."

The suggestion is that Lam's act of creation has, like the century, a tragic basis; and in order, therefore, for the conflicts peculiar to his branch of the family to be made fruitful, they are "*à sans cesse remettre à une meilleure place*".

The next stage in the journey is as follows:

> "*Il était à prévoir qu'à ce degré, traité en modestie, Lam ne bornerait pas son exigence aventureuse. Elle s'épurerait, s'enrichirait encore, se gardant de la luxuriance. On n'apercevrait certes pas la course joyeuse des moissoneurs comme chez les Dogon, mais le peintre, mon contemporain, partagerait avec ces derniers leur puissant instinct maternel et paternel ainsi que les expressions de leurs deuilleurs clamant la devise de mort. Un kinkajou bientôt vampiriserait le mouvement général des motifs. Putto cornu, frère de celui qui veillait Narcisse endormi à Rome sous les yeux de Poussin, il donnerait la caresse du fil à la faulx malicieuse, à moins que sa minuscule tête de clenche n'affleure les lignes d'une main tendue. Lam gagna, par des brisées probablement connues de lui seul, la clairière centrale. . . .*"
>
> "It was foreseeable that, with all due modesty, Lam's adventurous requirements would not limit themselves to this. They would be further refined and enriched, while remaining free of luxuriance. To be sure, there would be no glimpse of the joyful running to harvest one finds among the Dogon; yet the painter, my contemporary, would share with the latter their powerful maternal and paternal instincts and the attitude of their pall-bearers when proclaiming the device of death. Shortly thereafter, a kinkajou began preying on the general movement of the motifs. This horned *putto*, brother to the one who watched over Narcissus in Rome where he had fallen asleep under the eyes of Poussin, would bring the caress of a thread to the malicious scythe, unless his minuscule, latch-like head should happen to level the lines of an outstretched hand. By inroads known probably only to himself, Lam attained the central clearing. . . ."

Lam has pushed on—refining, extending, but taking care not to succumb to luxuriance. It is Char the moralist speaking, and the choice of luxuriance also informs us that Lam is making his way through a Latin American equivalent of Dante's *selva oscura*. He is engaged in some kind of harvesting. Again, as with the Picasso example earlier, by telling us that Lam's cannot be the "*course joyeuse des moissoneurs comme chez les Dogon*", Char implies that both parties *are*, none the less, engaged in similar activities; while "*certes*" shows us that Char, keeping pace with the reader, agrees that, whatever kinship an artist might feel with a culture like that of the Dogon, he cannot pretend to the "*course joyeuse*" of a whole people. What he does share with the Dogon is an extreme concern for the "family" (community) and for a culture in which death is recognised as an integral part of the cycle.

Enter death, then, in the shape of a carnivorous quadruped, nocturnal in its habits (see "kinkajou" in the Shorter OED), but a death that, for all its sinister apparel, is of a family with the *putti* of Renaissance painting and a child of love. The scythe ("*faulx*") has been freed of its malice and the central clearing attained:

> *Aile contre aile, pas sur pas, campait le peuple retiré des chimères butinantes. Famille animalhumaine issue de la sève prémonitoire de Lam. Dans le cérémonial de l'espace les gestes seraient multiples, les poses indolentes. Des sabots ferrés jetteraient dans l'air étincelles et résonances. On vivrait bien là entre parents, enfants et étrangers s'écoutant grandir, en dépit des brefs embrouillaminis provoqués par l'arbitrage de gros tétins inattendus jaillisant d'une poitrine savoureuse. Le radium même, dans une telle réunion, serait le grand scarabée de l'humus fiévreux, beau joueur cuivré et inoffensif. La réplique à l'imagination chez un tel peintre est confondante puisque le faulx parvient à donner la vie au lieu de la prendre. . . .*"
>
> "Wing to wing, step by step, a people drawn back from the bustling chimeras had set up tent. An animal-human family that had emerged from the premonitory sap of Lam. In the ceremonial of space, gestures would be

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manifold, attitudes indolent. Iron-shod hooves would send up sparks and echoes. It would be a pleasure to live there among parents, children and strangers, listening to one another growing, in spite of the occasional tangle resulting from the arbitration of plump and unforeseen teats rising from a sumptuous pair of breasts. Radium itself, in a gathering like this, would be the sacred scarab of feverish matter, a good loser, brazen and harmless. The rejoinder such a painter makes to the imagination is bewildering since the scythe succeeds in giving life rather than taking it away. . . ."

What we find in that central clearing is the "*famille animalhumaine*" that Lam's journey has been aiming to recover. "*Aile contre aile*" tells us that its members are close, "*pas sur pas*" that they enjoy a continuity and (along with "*campait*") that they are forever on the move, like the painter. They have turned their backs on the illusory order of predatory relations ("*chimères butinantes*") and inhabit a world where space is alive with "*gestes*" (a complex word that appears throughout Char's work and one of whose satellite meanings is "deeds", i.e., actions not yet divorced into the merely functional) and "*résonances*" (note also "*indolentes*" which steers us towards the second of the title's two terms). Here, where disputes would be short-lived and their origins visible, explicit (Char's seems to be suggesting that they can all be traced back to relations between men and women), people would be free to listen to one another growing. That Char characterises such a society as comprising "*parents, enfants et étrangers*" reassures us that it will be able to renew itself.

It is also, I suspect, an example of that discreet politics to be found throughout his work. Even an element of great sinister potential like radium would be integrated as a kind of ritual scarab symbolic of the fermentation of nature. What is disconcerting, Char continues, about Lam's "*réplique à l'imagination*" is that it gives life rather than takes it away. He explains:

> "*Il est vrai, l'outil-roi n'existe qu'en vol, en vol gradué, les bons sentiments n'apportent pas de preuves, s'expriment par percées, cabrioles, et signes. Quant à la large cruauté et la dévoration, sur la scène en regard de la toile, ces contradictions les font mentir jusqu'aux larmes. . . . Wifredo Lam, chevrier, ne gaspille pas l'espace. C'est pourquoi aussi l'aimons-nous, à fond de respiration, nous, mangeant en société et circulairement notre soupe de chapeaux, puis nos cornes de taureaux, puis la sieste des jours chauds.*
>
> *L'évidence nouvelle ne souffrirait pas de démenti. Il fallait la tenir pour certaine. L'imaginaire devenant visible et le réductible invisible, cet oeil-là, gravissant toute la lyre de la malignité, ne pourrait plus se tenir tranquille.*"
>
> "True, the kingly instrument exists only in flight, in graduated flight, and good intentions prove nothing, come through by means of breakthroughs, caprioles, signs. As for the widespread cruelty and the depredations, in the scene before us on the canvas, such contradictions show them to be lying even to the point of tears. . . . A goatherd, Wifredo Lam never wastes space. This is why we cherish him, with all our breath, we who eat together in a public circle our hat soup, then our bulls' horns, then the siesta of hot days. The new state of affairs was beyond refutation. It had to be taken as fact. With the imaginary now becoming visible and the reducible invisible, that particular eye, scaling the lyre of virulence, could no longer keep still."

Lam has been cutting away, then, but where previously the scythe had appeared "*malicieuse*" we now realise that it has actually been engaged in restoring us to the lost community. The reason Lam must proceed in this way is that "*l'outil-roi n'existe qu'en vol*" and "*les bons sentiments n'apportent pas de preuves*". The jump in logic here is quite strenuous but, as is generally the case with Char, when worked at will explain itself. There is, it appears, a supreme instrument or "*outil-roi*" with which the artist in particular is concerned but which Char takes care not to name: for to name something that has no demonstrable existence outside the action in which it is engaged would be to mislead us as to its nature. If that *outil-roi* is not to remain more or less a matter ultimately of subjective conviction, it must be revealed in action: and this is precisely what a work of art does by showing it at work within a complex but coherent setting. In the process, Lam also reveals the fundamentally dishonest nature, in the sense of a retreat from reality, of "*la large cruauté et la dévoration*", cruelty Char depicts as unhappiness that turns predatory and inflicts its own sufferings on others. What has brought it down, we discover, is the force of Lam's "contradictions" or counter-arguments and, once again, Char's phrasing allows maximum interpretation: "*les font mentir jusqu'aux larmes*" suggests both that it is we who are weeping at the extent of the tragedy revealed but also that cruelty itself can no longer sustain the masquerade and is confessing its tears.

Lam, then, has made good use of his allotted space, and this is one more reason why "we"—the pronoun is at once aristocratic and collective—value his adventure; "we" being a community to which Char declines to ascribe any fixed identity other than that of its three-course ritual *cuisine*, a decidedly bizarre affair that concludes with "*la sieste des jours chauds*"—an indication, no doubt, that the "Right to idleness" invoked in the title is none other than that freedom to participate in the unknown that Char affirms throughout his work as an active ingredient in any proper society and the artist's particular prerogative.

THE TEXT draws to its close: the "*monde des faits accomplis*" revealed to Char when he came upon the painter's work for the first time is, it transpires, the artist's translation of that moment of "*évidence nouvelle*" when he awakens to the relatively mercurial nature of the seen world and the relatively real nature of the forces of the imagination. It is the point at which the painter's eye can no longer "*se tenir tranquille*" and at which his work, as ours before the canvas now, begins.

As we have seen, Char's way of working was unusual: his texts tend to be built up cumulatively, wave upon wave as it were, as though by coming at his theme in this way he will finally manage to surround it on the page. The reader

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has, therefore, to approach them in similar fashion, once the initial contact has been made. The price paid for this is a certain clouding or impenetrability at times; but in his best work Char makes up for this by an energy and attention that wins the reader's trust. And, in the case of the Lam tribute, it's worth noticing how simple the underlying structure and movement is, as though Char was recounting the most ordinary sequence of events.

The figure that finally emerges from Char's work seems likely to remain that of the "tragic optimist" evoked by Camus in 1952. If the character of his writing varies little thereafter, numerous poems scattered throughout his later collections add to and refine the body of work contained in *Fureur et mystère* and *Les Matinaux* on which his reputation will probably rest. He had a core vocabulary that was entirely his own (a word like "*enjamber*" now has a spiritual resonance that was not there before); and he did more than any writer of his generation to keep alive the range and variousness of French. Above all, he restored to their proper magnificence and pride of place the elemental aspects of man's existence, and a vision of Nature as healing and companionable. Who but Char could have written of a young viper: "*Une goutte d'eau pourrait le coiffer, deux brindilles le revêtir* (A drop of water could serve as hat, two twigs as his attire)"? The tragic optimism to which Camus referred was that of a man largely free of that undercurrent of hysteria which runs through much of the work of even the best of his contemporaries, and little disposed to quick-fire panaceas. If he could not dispense with the idea of wisdom, nor could he find any abiding reason for despair; like Montaigne's Heraclitus, Wisdom, in one of Char's best-known poems, emerges from the walls at Lascaux, "her eyes filled with tears".

For an Old Friend

Now, old friend, it is time
to rise and shine. So
early you say? Yes,
earlier every day now: your
fault that we have this
inclination.

Look at the crocuses, beginning
to open, be radiant, live by
a golden rule . . . which
let me do also; in
this weather could almost be
one myself

as you are, surely: a crocus
radiant all day but more even
than they are, brightest best
son of the morning; and in
the full sense, in the round,
enlightening

though silent; which let
enlighten us all, best
and oldest friend, who nine
months before I saw you, brought
spring, delighting lovers who
sunnily began me.

So incline us more and more
towards you, king of the sky,
until we live in the light
of high summer; and
may your reign of gold prolong
long into autumn.

John Holloway

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Books Encountered

The Failure of the State. By RODNEY ATKINSON. Compuprint Publishing, £5.95.

"Although Nigel Lawson . . . lapsed . . . , he is after all only the nation's 'Finance Director'. . . . We must blame the nation's 'Managing Director' next door." No, not another plea for full British membership of the European Monetary System, but the third in the author's polemics against corporatism, as acute, witty, and well-documented as ever.

Not By Fact Alone: Essays on the Writing and Reading of History. By JOHN CLIVE. Collins Harvill, £15.00.

Relaxed, tolerant, civilised consideration of the canonical narrative historians: Gibbon, Macaulay, Michelet, Carlyle, Trevelyan, Halévy, mostly written it would seem for non-specialists. But historians should enjoy and ponder the book.

Paris on the Eve: 1900-1914. By VINCENT CRONIN. Collins, £18.00.

Immensely evocative survey of *la belle époque avant le déluge*. The illustrations say it all: Bergson, Barrès, Poincaré, Jaurès, Gide, Claudel, Proust, Péguy, Debussy, Ravel, Nijinsky, Reynaldo Hahn; Marie Laurençin, Apollinaire, Picasso, Gertrude Stein; Sarah Bernhardt, Romain Rolland, the murdered editor Gaston Calmette.

The Making of The Independent. By MICHAEL CROZIER. Coronet, £3.99.

Not too adulatory or breathless account of how Britain's most successful new daily newspaper was financed, planned, launched, and achieved. Attractions include the long dither over competing title pieces, once the title had been settled by market research. One conclusion: "Technoloy [*sic*] has played a major part." H'm.

The Tightrope Walker. By HERMINE DEMORIANE. Secker & Warburg, £17.50.

Fascinating account of how the author learned funambulism, on ropes over pools and scrub, interspersed with historical glimpses of other famous performers, lavishly illustrated in colour and black-and-white. Her personal life in the diary seems something of a tightrope walk, too.

Yours etc.: Letters to the Press. By GRAHAM GREENE. Selected and introduced by CHRISTOPHER HAWTREE. Reinhardt Books in association with Viking, £14.95.

Quite useful as a bed book for the guest-room: *obiter dicta*, many rather dotty, on a magpie's nest of subjects, beginning in 1943 (*Horizon*) and ending last August in defence of the Net Book Agreement. The obsessive anti-Americanism jars, like the espousal of dubious political causes; but there's some fun as well.

The Time of My Life: Entertaining the Troops. By JOYCE GRENFELL. Edited and introduced by JAMES ROOSE-EVANS. Hodder & Stoughton, £15.00.

Delightful diary of gallant and gruelling wartime concert tours, many to hospitals, all over: North Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, India. Sharp, witty comments and descriptions, brilliant thumbnail sketches (e.g. of Harold Macmillan in Algiers), funny and moving stories, great stage expertise.

Keith Joseph: A Single Mind. By MORRISON HALCROW. Macmillan, £14.95.

"Who's that Professor?" asked a senior European Commissioner when Sir Keith (as he then was) accompanied the Prime Minister to Brussels. Morrison Halcrow doesn't tell this story, but his sympathetic book explains how "a politician can reach heights of achievement by force of sincerity and intellectual integrity".

Writers Revealed. By ROSEMARY HARTILL. BBC Books, £5.99.

Religion informs but doesn't dominate these revealing in-depth interviews conducted by the BBC's Religious Affairs Correspondent with Anthony Burgess, Sara Maitland, Brian Moore, John Mortimer, Iris Murdoch, Piers Paul Read, Bernice Rubens, and A. N. Wilson. Easily comparable with those in *The Paris Review*.

The Prince of Wales: Right or Wrong? An Architect Replies. By MAXWELL HUTCHINSON. Foreword by RICHARD ROGERS. Faber, £4.99, $8.95.

Rather hasty attempt to defend what its author calls "neo-modernism" against both H.R.H.'s understandable detestation of faceless, bullying blocks and towers, and neo-classical façadery. Its most hopeful analogy is drawn with Suzuki violin playing. But that begins with Baroque and seldom reaches *musique concrète*. H.R.H. rules, OK?

The Remains of the Day. By KAZUO ISHIGURO. Faber, £10.99.

This year's Booker Prize winner might well be entitled *What the Butler Remembered*, since its hero Stevens, 35 years in service to Lord Darlington, uses a 1956 West Country car trip to reminisce, and re-evalue his past actions, in a prose closer to Jeeves than to Japan, which its author left at the age of six. Funny, touching, and profound.

The Nature of History. By ARTHUR MARWICK. Macmillan, £30.00, paper £8.95.

Wholly rewritten third edition of this 1970 classic by the Professor of History at the Open University: at once a history of History, a placing of it, and a guide to research, historiography, presentation, and polemics. A user's manual in contrast to John Clive's literary essays considered above.

Portraits of the Past: The British Landscape Through the Ages. By RICHARD MUIR. Michael Joseph, £14.95.

Tellingly illustrated *aperçus* of what Britain looked like, and why, from about 200,000 years ago to the 18th century. The author's first discipline was geography; but students of history (and conservation) will both enjoy his book and learn from it. They will also have a great deal to mourn.

Literature of Europe and America in the 1960s. Edited by SPENCER PEARCE and DON PIPER. Manchester University Press, £29.95.

Nine slightly uneven essays, two by the editors (on Italy and the Soviet Union), the rest on the USA, West and East Germany, Spanish America, Brazil, Spain, France, and Britain. Each invokes the political background and has a useful bibliography; but the whole book disgracefully lacks an index.

Making an Impact. By HARVEY THOMAS and LIZ GILL. David & Charles, £10.95.

Punchy, first-rate anecdote-packed primer on how to get message across, from a famous packager of Tory Conferences and similar events, himself a casualty of the Brighton bombing. Most of the advice sounds like common sense; but it includes tips on the wattage of amplifiers, use of the autocue, and other arcane technicalities.

R.M.

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The Kingdom of Kabul?

Régimes, & Their Survival—By ANATOL LIEVEN

THE KABUL University official had spent most of the interview repeating Dr Najibullah's lines about his régime's desire for peace and a political settlement—without, it seemed to me, much hope of being believed — but now he was speaking from the heart. . . . "You must understand", he told me, "that we stand for education and progress in this country. Out there is only backwardness and superstition, barbarism even." By "out there", he meant, of course, the Mujaheddin, but his words also implied much more: the division between Kabul and Afghanistan—between the modern Afghan state and the classes it created on the one hand, and traditional Afghan society on the other. In less dramatic form, such words could have been spoken by an educated "Kabuli" official any time this past half-century.

Given the nature of the two sides, it was virtually inevitable that, with the Soviet Army gone, the sympathy of Western journalists should begin to swing over to the régime. Visitors to Kabul meet educated men speaking of "progress". More important, they see educated women in Western dress. Then they go to Peshawar and see the way the Mujaheddin and Afghan refugee society treats women—and the resulting article almost writes itself. However, this image of "progress" contains many ambiguities. The régime seems to be gradually winning its battle for survival, on both the propaganda and the military fronts. But it is doing so largely because, in the midst of the semi-anarchy which now covers most of Afghanistan, Dr Najibullah and his people have retained a complete monopoly on the institutions of state. This means that they can increasingly rely on the acquiescence of the state-supporting classes, because the only other national "government"—that of the Mujaheddin alliance in Peshawar—is a bad joke, as almost everyone but, seemingly, the US State Department now realises. Abdul Wakil, the Foreign Minister, put it to me directly:

> "Here in Kabul we have a state and a system, and it is the only one in Afghanistan. Even the Americans must realise sooner or later that this Mujaheddin 'interim government' of theirs will never amount to anything. So how can you ask us to dissolve our government?"

This "State" now barely exists outside Kabul and a few other urban centres—but then, this has been true for most of Afghanistan's history.

FOR MOST of the 19th century the lands under the suzerainty of the Durrani Kings were known to observers as "the Kingdom of Kabul"—the title of Mountstuart Elphinstone's early 19th-century account of the Durrani territories, in which he remarked that "these people have no name for their country". And indeed, the feebleness of Afghan national allegiance, when compared to the much more real and vivid claims of local community, has been remarked by travellers up to the present. The Kingdom's borders were laid down by Imperial Britain and Russia; within them was a rag-bag of Central Asian peoples, traditionally at war. Many observers (like the French scholar Olivier Roy) have seen a great growth of national feeling in the course of the war against the Soviets—but it would seem on present evidence that this warfare would have had to go on a great deal longer for any real "nation-building" process to occur. Fighters in the field may use the words "Mujaheddin Afghanistan" as a sort of talisman—often with a wry giggle, in the face of some particularly grisly snafu—but their primary allegiance remains in most cases obstinately local. Appeals for sympathy or assistance from other Mujaheddin are still prefixed by the traditional cry of "*Mussalmanan!*" ("Muslims!"), much as Russian peasants used to address each other as "Ye Orthodox!"

The extension of "the Kingdom of Kabul" into "Afghanistan" was principally the work of King Abdur Rehman, in the last decades of the 19th century. Backed by the British and

ANATOL LIEVEN *(b. 1960, educated at City of London School and Jesus College, Cambridge) was until recently the correspondent in Islamabad for "The Times" (London); he also writes for "The Economist" and "The Spectator". He has travelled extensively in Afghanistan with both the Mujaheddin and the Kabul régime forces, and in March was present on the Mujaheddin side during the battle for Jalalabad. In October he was forced to return to England after sustaining spinal injuries when, on the way to visit the forces of Commander Ahmedshah Masoud in northern Afghanistan, his jeep crashed on a mountain road.*

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by modern military technology, he led a series of brutal campaigns to crush and assimilate recalcitrant tribes and ethnic groups. The state which resulted retained a strong military stamp, summed up for me by the bleak Idgahi mosque in Kabul, with its parade-ground-like forecourt—the very image of a dusty, impoverished Islamic Prussianism.

The army which upheld this monarchy always knew that its principal role was to extend the state by defeating tribal, ethnic, and religious opposition within its borders. Similarly the Kabul generals of today do not feel themselves simply to be defending the present régime; they are conscious of acting within a 100-year-old tradition. This may be one factor in making them a much tougher and more impressive bunch to meet than were, I imagine, their South Vietnamese equivalents.

Under King Abdur Rehman's heirs, internal conquest was accompanied, as elsewhere in the uncolonised "Third World", by "modernisation"—in effect, Westernisation. The state's reach was never very long, but for as far as it could reach, the break with the past was radical. Of central importance was the decision to create a university system along entirely Western lines. This embodied chairs of Islamic theology, but completely omitted the traditional system of religious schools, the *Madrassehs*, which had been the heart of whatever education system Afghanistan had possessed. Already intellectually sterile, these sank still further into a scholastic moribundity which is all too depressingly reflected in the attitudes of many Mujaheddin commanders from this background.

THESE STATE POLICIES of course provoked resistance, which came to a head in the overthrow of the radical reformist King Amanullah in 1929 by a tribal and religious revolt led by an illiterate Tadzhik bandit, Baccha-e-Saqao—the Water Carrier's Son—whose nickname indicates his lowly origins. Reaction against Amanullah's reforms had been building up for years, but one of the sparking points was the belief that he wished to encourage women's education (the precipitating factor in many local revolts against the Communists in 1978 and 1979). Orthodox religious figures joined with the tribes to overthrow him.

Other factors in this revolt were the *Pailuch* (Barefeet) of Kandahar, and the *Ayars* of Kabul. These semi-criminal groups, with their ideology of vengeance against "unjust" landlords and officials, are the very archetype of Professor Eric Hobsbawm's "Social Bandits". Similarly, the Mujaheddin, into whom these groups naturally flowed, are in some ways a type of Hobsbawm's "Primitive Rebels"—with all the drawbacks for modern state formation which this implies.

King Amanullah, far more than any Communist hero, is now the model cited by spokesmen of the Kabul régime. However, the implementation of the reform programme launched by the original Communist régime after the "Saur Revolution" of 1979 shows that they had learnt nothing from the real causes of the revolt against him. The royal governments which followed Amanullah—after Baccha-e-Saqao had been defeated and killed by Nadir Khan, the King's uncle—did learn this lesson, and were careful not to push reforms beyond the tolerance of the population. In particular, attempts were made to associate religious figures with the state, at every level. But in real terms, their power continued to decline—a fact of which they were well aware.

In the absence of real economic development and the growth of a modern bourgeoisie, the new middle classes were overwhelmingly dependent on the state for employment. The new generations of modern educated youths were essential for the royal state's plans to modernise Afghanistan, but they also, as so often, brought about its downfall. A Party member in Kabul told me that the real reason for the Communist coup of 1978—even Party members no longer call it "a revolution"—took place because "there were 13,000 in high school in Kabul, university places for 1,500, and jobs for even fewer than that. Those jobs were all taken by the aristocracy."

The job-nobbling is open to question; resentment among educated youths, including junior army officers, is not. And it was the latter who carried out the coup against President Daud in April 1978. In many ways, however, the true representative figure of the régime that followed was not the officer but the schoolteacher, the miserably paid shock-troops of "progress" in the countryside, clinging to their moth-eaten astrakhan hats as symbols of poor cousinhood with the bureaucracy. Many were as dedicated as their 19th-century European equivalents to abolishing religious superstition and "backwardness". Such men formed the backbone of the radical, mainly lower-middle-class *Khalqi* (People's) faction of the "Communist" Party. In fact, despite the influence of the Soviet Union, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was never Communist. It might perhaps best be described as Jacobin, above all in its obsession with the local variant of anti-clericalism.

Amin Arsala, now "Minister of Finance" in the Mujaheddin "interim government", recalled for me his Communist class-fellows at Kabul University:

> "There was never much discussion of programmes, or of the nature of Afghan society. As I remember, most of their talk was against the existence of God."

A logical enough approach, perhaps, in a country where God has so often proved to be the only real mass political leader, and in which religion has always played a key role in resistance to "progress".

The dedication with which the first Mujaheddin went round killing schoolteachers and burning down schools was not simply (as the régime would have it) the result of hatred of modern education. It was also because the schoolteacher was rightly seen as a crucial local agent of the state. One aspect of this has been summed up by the Pakistani Left-wing analyst Raja Anwar, who shared Phul-e-Charki prison with successive Communist leaderships, in his account of the attempted land reform. Officially, this was supposed to be implemented by local committees, each with two peasant representatives. In fact, "There was never any intention to associate peasants with the operation directly. Almost everywhere, the two 'peasant representatives' were schoolteachers coopted by the local district administration."

The blind, brutal foolishness with which this measure and other desirable reforms were implemented rubs in how far

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the schoolteachers had been alienated from the peasantry they were supposed to be teaching. Many seem to have wandered raving in from the pages of some Afghan Balzac chronicling the petty and not so petty insanities of provincial nests of "educated" society, isolated in a peasant sea.

Khalqi policies, under Taraki and Amin, caused the revolts among these peasants that led to Soviet intervention. The role of a Soviet-backed "Thermidor"—to continue the French revolutionary analogy—was then provided by the *Parcham* (Banner) faction. Its leader, installed by the Russians as President, was Babrak Karmal, the son of a royal general. The leadership of this faction has always belonged to sons and daughters of the old élite, swayed by romantic Marxism and exasperation with the slow pace of "progress" under the régime of King Zahir Shah. Dr Najibullah, Karmal's lieutenant and supplanter, is properly Najibullah Khan, from a prominent family of the Ahmedzai branch of the Gilzai family of tribes. His Minister of Border (formerly Tribal) Affairs, Suleiman Laik, is the brother-in-law of the President of the Mujaheddin "interim government", Professor Sibghatullah Mujadidi.

At least since the initiation of Dr Najibullah's "National Reconciliation" policy two-and-a-half years ago, the government has been trying to use such contacts to woo back upper-class and "technocratic" exiles from the West. It has also used the hereditary prestige of some of its members with certain tribes in its "pacification" attempts. One example of this has been the successive appointment to the post of military governor of Kandahar of men like the present incumbent, General Ulumi, who comes from the royal clan of the Durrani tribal network.

Dr Najibullah's policy might now be called the reconstitution of the old royal élite on a broader basis. Officials of the present régime may wear Army fatigues with their gold watches, but the throne-like chairs from which they address petitioners are the same as in the old days. The Mujaheddin, by contrast, reflect much of the traditional egalitarianism of Afghan tribal society. Most of the great Khan families have been displaced by the war, and the greater number of field commanders are ordinary men—peasants or religious students—who have risen through battle.

Dr Najibullah's policy has naturally been unpopular with the Khalqis. The enduring feud between the factions was one reason why observers—including many Soviet ones—believed that the régime would not survive the Soviet withdrawal. We failed to take into account two factors. The first is the political skill and charisma of Dr Najibullah. So far, this has had very little effect on the general population, even in Kabul, but it has done a great deal for the morale of the Party. This makes it even less likely that the Party leadership would agree of its own accord to sacrifice Dr Najibullah as the precondition of a settlement. Some régime supporters admit in unguarded moments that they see no reason why Dr Najibullah should ever resign.

The other reason for régime coherence is, of course, as one Politburo member said, "With the Russians gone, we all knew it was life or death for us". Whether this cohesion will last is another matter. In July, no sooner had the Mujaheddin threat to Jalalabad receded than an apparent quarrel between Najibullah and Shahnawaz Tanai, his Khalqi Defence Minister, brought tanks on to the streets of Kabul—perhaps a move by Najibullah to forestall any possible attempt at a coup.

Party history, and indeed that of Afghanistan, suggests that when the threat of an outright Mujaheddin victory is seen to have vanished, régime supporters will be at each other's throats, and then will be likely to seek Mujaheddin allies. The process may already have begun. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the radical Mujaheddin leader, has advocated talks with disgruntled Khalqi elements; and representatives of the traditionalist (or "moderate") Pir Ahmed Gailani have also been in Kabul for talks. The end result can hardly be foreseen, except that it will probably be extremely messy.

In the meantime—and it may be a long one—outright Mujaheddin victory is becoming less and less likely; and "the Mujaheddin" in any case look even less like an entity than they have ever done. The reason for their failure to unite is implicit in the character of their revolt. Grounded in the resistance of local societies to state encroachment on their traditional autonomy, it was also a revolt of all the groups which had been left out by the state, whether economically or culturally, in its attempts at modernisation. This in the end turned out to be most of the population. For them, the promises of development by successive régimes proved illusory, and the growing cultural difference between them and their rulers added insult to injury.

Their revenge, in the general maelstrom of the Russian war, has been the obliteration of the state from the Afghan countryside. Even those areas apparently in government hands are in reality controlled by tribal militias.

FOR A TRAVELLER in the wastelands that are "the liberated areas" of Afghanistan, the signs that a state ever existed are almost archaeological: a few stretches of paved road . . . a collapsed embankment . . . the occasional ruined administrative building. Beyond that, nothing. Nor is it easy to envisage the reappearance of any organised authority throughout most of Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. In five journeys to the Mujaheddin-controlled areas, I have not seen even the beginnings of a real administration, or of planning for reconstruction. In many areas the *Shuras* (Pashto: *Jirgas*)—the councils on which so many hopes were placed—do not exist. Where they do, they have proved incapable of developing beyond the functions of reconciling local disputes, and planning joint military operations—their traditional functions in Afghan tribal society. There is no sign that they could form the basis for a future national administration.

This is the tragedy of the Mujaheddin. They are a genuinely democratic force, both in the structure of individual groups in the field, and in the sense that they stem directly from the rural people and their traditions. Unfortunately, they seem incapable of generating effective political or even military institutions. To employ two Pashto words used as paradigms by the anthropologist Akbar S. Ahmed, *Nang* (Honour), implying the mountains, feuding, and freedom, has overwhelmed *Qalang* (Rent), with its associations of settled life in the plains. Many people—including, it would seem, a number in the American security establishment—

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have believed that modern radical Islam could provide the organising principle which the Mujaheddin lacked. This was part of the reason why the CIA acquiesced in the favouritism displayed by President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan towards the radical Hezbe Islami party of Mr Gulbuddin Hekmatyar—despite Hekmatyar's personal ruthlessness, unpopularity with other parties, and hatred of the West.

This acquiescence was based on a false analysis. Modern political Islam is the product not of purely traditional societies (like most of Afghanistan before the Soviet intervention) but of traditional societies in the throes of change and urbanisation. Its characteristic recruit comes from the urban lower-middle classes, or is a migrant from the countryside. His ideology is a reaction against Westernisation in the name of a "return to basics", but is itself politically modern. The Afghan peasantry, however, had no need to embrace the politics of a "return to tradition". They had never been wrenched away from these traditions, which they regard as the true Islam. So the radical Islamist desire to change many traditions in the name of Koranic Islam provokes a furious response from many Mujaheddin—even those who owe allegiance, in theory, to radical parties.

As an old Mujaheddin from Younus Khalis's party put it to me on the road to Ghazni:

> "We will kill all Gulbuddin's people before we will change the faith of our fathers. For what else did we fight the Russians?"

There is, therefore, little real danger of a totalitarian "fundamentalist" Mujaheddin régime in Kabul. Even if they can win, there is no chance of them being able to establish any organised régime. All that the creation of the seven Mujaheddin parties has done, in the end, is to frustrate what could have been a return to the old Afghan tradition of local chiefs choosing a single national war-leader.

WHAT ARE the implications of this for US policy? The most important, it seems to me, is that the attempt to encourage the Mujaheddin to develop governmental structures should be abandoned, in practice, if not openly. It simply will not work.

This carries with it the implication that any future government must be built upon the structures now existing in Kabul. But it should not, if possible, imply the continuation in power of the PDPA as a whole. As I found during a stay in Kabul in June, the party remains bitterly unpopular with the great majority, even with most of the population of Kabul, and with educated people. I saw no evidence that many regard Najibullah as a "nationalist".

Most strikingly of all, most of the women students I spoke with in the University expressed their loathing for the régime. This is hardly surprising. Among the established Kabul families, hardly one has not had a member imprisoned or executed under PDPA rule, while more recent migrants were mostly driven into the city by Soviet terror-bombing. The régime's treason is unlikely to be forgotten.

Many of these girls said that they were wearing Western dress only in order to avoid being discriminated against by the government, and would cheerfully don Islamic dress if a Mujaheddin government came to power. This, however, they thought increasingly unlikely. They were disappointed with Mujaheddin disunity, and worried by what they called "the ruthlessness" of radical Mujaheddin leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Abdurrasul Sayyaf. Like everyone else, they placed no credence whatsoever in Dr Najibullah's offer of a coalition government with the Mujaheddin parties. They thought that the only chance of peace was some version of a "neutral" government.

In this context, the name of the former King, Zahir Shah, is often mentioned; and the very determination with which members of the régime rule out any governmental role for him shows that they are afraid of his popularity. In many ways this is due less to the personality of that weak but generally amiable monarch than to the fact that his name is being used as a cipher for a solution which excludes the nastier elements of both the Kabul régime and the Mujaheddin, and is based upon bureaucrats and former royal ministers. A number of Party members in Kabul, utterly sick of the war, indicated to me that, whatever Najibullah said, they themselves favour this solution. It is also the preference of the United Nations Secretary General and his staff. There is no pretending that a role for such "neutral" elements would be easy. The régime would accept it only under the pressure of military defeats, or from Moscow, or both.

On the Mujaheddin side, as I have stressed, much of the motor of their cause has been provided by pent-up bitterness at the rule of precisely such Westernised "technocrats"—intensified by the ideology of the radical Islamists and by the feeling of many ordinary Mujaheddin that the "technocrats" were living comfortably in Europe and the USA while they were fighting and dying. When the United Nations special envoy, Diego Cordovez, proposed a list of names of "respected" figures whom he hoped might be able to pave the way for elections and peace, the radical Mujaheddin groups responded with outrage. The name of King Zahir Shah still causes this reaction.

If the Mujaheddin cannot agree among themselves, or win on the battlefield, then sooner or later the United States Congress is going to reduce their supplies—quite possibly on the occasion of the Appropriations debate next spring. At that stage, the Administration will have a choice. It can wash its hands of the Mujaheddin altogether; or, together with the government of Miss Bhutto, it can plunge its hands still further into the cauldron in an effort to force them towards a peace which the Soviet Union could accept. The pressure of facts seems already to be pushing Pakistan in that direction. One major problem for the peace process is the acute instability of Pakistan's politics. Miss Bhutto's government is almost paralysed in the face of repeated opposition attempts to topple it, and an opposition government is likely to be equally paralysed by its own internal divisions.

Since America's strong interest in the stability of Pakistan would hardly allow it simply to wash its hands of Afghanistan, the logical conclusion is that sooner or later the US Administration will have to aim seriously at a negotiated peace. Given the colossal problems involved, it must now begin to think in detail about how to achieve this. But of such thought there is as yet little sign.

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MEDIA

The Enraged Voices of Opposition

Are We Getting "New Times" for Old?—By JULIUS GOULD

A NIGHTMARE haunts many of Britain's "liberal" intellectuals. Can Mrs Thatcher fulfil her promise to go "on and on"? Seized of the need for a "kinder, gentler" country, one more open to their own fastidious guidance, they fear the worst. There is no conspiracy (and I am no addict of conspiracy theories), but sundry academics, arts-persons, and journalists have long since anticipated the Labour Party's current call to "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change". Often their frustrations push them into abusive detestation and mockery; they slip into an obsession with the wider, almost metaphysical, concept of "Thatcher".

Yet they also feel the need to take stock of the last ten years—and try, in so far as their prejudices allow, to assess "Thatcherism" in its long-term social and economic context. There is a growing zeal to turn the new social trends, including Mrs Thatcher's achievements, to *their* advantage as distinct from hers. Some pin their hopes solely on Labour (though I detect no deep respect for Labour's leader and scant sign of any "Kinnockism"). Most of them dream of a new alignment of the "anti-Thatcher" brigades, with Labour at its core—preferably before the next election; if not then, well later . . . . The more astute among them prepare for a very long haul.

Slowly the opponents of "Thatcher" have begun to regroup, forming not, as yet, one movement but several bustling, overlapping coteries. This crystallised late in 1988, for example, in the manifesto of "Charter 88", which called, *inter alia*, for "a fair electoral system of proportional representation", and in the emergence of the journal *Samizdat*, which seeks to overcome party differences and create:

> ". . . a progressive, post-Thatcher consensus. The Steering Group and contributors range from Eric Hobsbawm of the Communist Party to Michael Young of the SDP."[1]

To which should be added the Communist Party's campaign for "New Times", the vision of Gorbachov as a kind of Kennedy, and their own persistent advocacy of proportional representation.

All these trends and anxieties are reflected in *The Guardian*, especially through the fluent twice-weekly columns of Hugo Young. The strength of those columns lies in their coverage of moods and personalities rather than in economic minutiae. If you miss him in *The Guardian* you can—such are the loopholes in "Thatcherite tyranny"—catch him on radio and television. And now he has written *One Of Us*, a lengthy and thoroughly unofficial biography of Mrs Thatcher.[2] In the opening chapters, on her life in Grantham, he keeps calling her Margaret; but Margaret is not, to put it mildly, one of Hugo Young's favourite people . . . . Several themes run through the book—for example, the struggle between her principles and her pragmatism, and the coexistence of what he calls her "Machiavellian" and her "Amazonian" personae during three terms of office, "with no reason to doubt the possibility of a fourth". Tribute is paid where it is inescapable, but the overall tone ranges from the sceptical to the distrustful.

Possibly he is depressed by Margaret Thatcher's Methodist origins; they certainly provoke a reference to "dreary Grantham and the priggish solemnities of her Methodist home". Young is, after all, a Catholic liberal, educated at Ampleforth, trying—carefully but unevenly—to understand some very complicated matters. Life around Whitehall may be an open book to him, and indeed several of his Westminster set-pieces make vivid, sometimes enthralling, reading. But nothing can make him so expert on the Kesteven and Grantham Girls School which "Margaret" attended during his infancy. . . . And like most of today's self-nominated "new dissenters" (some of whom have been dissenting for decades and are pretty long in their non-conformist teeth) he is upset by her no-nonsense materialism and her moral convictions, including a supposed affinity with what Young calls "Jewish virtues". Several parts of the book glow with liberal self-caricature, but few are more touching than his lofty but doleful reference to what those "virtues" are:

> ". . . not the part of the Jewish tradition which

[1] Michael Young has since rejoined the Labour Party.
[2] *One of Us*. By HUGO YOUNG. Macmillan, £16.95.

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emphasises caring and compassion but rather that which elevates self-help, an absence of materialistic guilt, and the community of the self-sufficient."

Similarly elevated and doleful noises have come in the Thatcher years from university people (who have a genuine grievance over pay and conditions of work), comfortable writers (who have not), and socialist Bishops (who are certainly guilty about "materialism" and uneasy about "self-help"). *One Of Us*, especially in Chapter 18, describes and mirrors their resentments. Many and angry are the grievances—often from illustrious arbiters of other people's tastes. The book does not quote the more recent indictments of Thatcher from Salman Rushdie or Margaret Drabble, but the complaints of Melvyn Bragg, Carmen Callil, Peter Hall, and Jonathan Miller ("theatre director and polymath") are duly recorded. Their intemperance and rage are "condoned" because there had been an earlier "Thatcher rage" against the egalitarian enemies of the enterprise culture or those who saw no limits to state-organised "care and compassion". By the same token, a writer who favours "Thatcher" is likely to be dubbed by Young as a "house-philosopher" or described as "wheeled out of the libraries and common rooms" as if he (or she) is some servile creature incapable of independent movement. Special rage is reserved by the Pundits for those who, like Paul Johnson, had once been advocates of "democratic socialism" or, like Lord Chalfont, had actually served in a Labour government. Such "traitors" induce pain among the *bien-pensants*, even as old-style Tories resent their intrusion into paternalist preserves.

Hugo Young is among those who complain that Mrs Thatcher has "politicised" everything, including the clash between ideas. The line is not that she is uninterested in ideas, but that she favours the "wrong" ideas or ideology—even though they seldom get priority over short-term political calculations. Of course the social and moral components of "Thatcher" *are* far removed from the consensus of the previous decades. The structures of that "social democratic" consensus, it is now widely accepted, had crumbled by 1979: and its promoters were bound to be eclipsed. In any event the Prime Minister, either on her own or under instruction from others, had rumbled them. But it is naive to claim that *she* brought politics intrusively into the realm of the arts or of ideas. This would be true only if we put egalitarian nostrums uniquely above and beyond politics and accept that under no circumstances could any counter-offensive be considered or mounted. Such an offensive against a deeply entrenched body of ideas restructures both policies and patronage: it is therefore bound to be political, and to pain the newly dispossessed. . . The English pretence that difficult issues like the distribution (pre-emptively and deceptively called "redistribution") of income or the control of industry are "non-political" is an illusion that has outlived its time.

INEVITABLY, THEN, those who cherish such illusions have reacted against the faults deemed central to the dreaded "Thatcher"—especially the competitive spirit and the absence of a drive towards "equality". The argument is over how to make Labour "electorally credible", over what compromises over "socialism", what concessions to the stubborn facts of "Thatcher", can be made—not out of conviction but out of a shifting, unpredictable necessity. For many that necessity includes an "understanding" between Labour and other opposition parties, leading to electoral reform.

On the surface there is a rational tone to many of these arguments, and among the movements that sponsor them. It is too soon to prejudge their chances. Possibly the hour may come for this New Left. More possibly the political backing will be too fragile, ordinary voters will recognise opportunism when they see it, and the new groups (and their spokesmen in the press) are in for a cruel disappointment. A note of absurdity and a touch of hatred are often just below the surface. Both *Samizdat* (with its revealing call for a "popular front of the mind") and "Charter 88" are sobriquets that recall, tastelessly enough, genuine heroic movements against Communist despotism. Yet, in all apparent seriousness, Lord Young of Dartington says he thought up the title *Samizdat*,[3] with its conscious echo of genuine Soviet dissidence, as a way of comparing "Thatcher" with the novelties of Gorbachov's régime. The contrast is far from flattering.

> ". . . we, in the very home of liberty, are moving in the opposite direction. A Tsarina stalks the blessed land of Paine and Wilkes and Lilburne."

Everyone recalls—so Lord Young omits to tell us—what happened to the last real Czarina. . . .

The words *Samizdat* and the "popular front of the mind" suggest a parallel between "Thatcher" and both Hitler and Brezhnev. It is difficult to know which of the analogies is (or was designed to be) the more offensive.

Then there is the strange case of the Communist Party of Great Britain. It is minuscule in size, let alone electoral support; yet in 1984-85 it enjoyed (if that is the right word) a rough split between rival factions. One "harder" faction now controls the old Party newspaper—the *Morning Star*. But a greater radiance comes from the other, and official, "filofax" crowd and *Marxism Today*, its well-connected, glossy, "theoretical and discussion journal". Since Martin Jacques took over as editor from the veteran Communist James Klugmann[4] in September 1977, he has won an outreach and *réclame* that his predecessor would envy. Opening his pages to the Professors of Anti-Thatcherism, and still more generously to members of parties other than his own, he has pub-

[3] *Samizdat*'s principal promoter—the ubiquitous Professor Ben Pimlott—writes glibly about the need to assemble "a popular front of the mind", on the ground that "almost any progressive administration would be superior to the government that holds power". I appreciate the delicacy of "almost".

[4] James Klugmann (1912-77) was one of those Cambridge Communists who merit, but will never get, a truthful biography. For twenty years he wrote non-glossy, turgid editorials without wider recognition. He made notorious, often risible, accommodations to the changing Party line, and who knows what trouble he had with the Party's earthier élites? He seems to have led a twilight and possibly satisfied existence: his labours allowed him time to write a volume of the Party's history, and, just possibly, to keep discreetly in touch with old Cambridge friends.

He figures in several recent books. Robert Cecil in his account of

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lished articles by or interviews with Labour politicians of various tinges, from Tony Benn to Bryan Gould and Denis Healey, and by such other notables as Paddy Ashdown and Michael Heseltine. (Edward Heath was accorded the privilege of an interview with *The Guardian*'s Hugo Young.)

Jacques and company need no encouragement about a "popular front of the mind"! In autumn 1988 they started a major propaganda exercise. It was at the time when Labour was preparing a statement on "aims and values" for its extended policy review. Partly in parallel, partly in preemption, *Marxism Today* came up with two interwoven initiatives. The September issue was, in its way, an astute mélange. Its cover bore a picture of Prince Charles with the legend "THE GOVERNMENT'S ROYAL OPPOSITION", and an article within featured a standard item from anti-Thatcher *agit-prop*—the alleged tensions between a selfish Thatcher and a compassionate Royal Family. With a stroke of *chutzpah*, this was at once followed by a long "special Communist Party supplement" called "Facing Up To The Future", from a group of eight writers appointed by the Communist Party's executive committee.[5] It addressed "the need to confront the radically-changed world in which we now live, and how that requires us to rethink the Left's policies and perspectives".

Those perspectives ranged far and wide—and in a thoroughly modern way: Gorbachov gets due praise and Lenin is discourteously ignored. . . . Most of the document is about domestic politics; the key premise is that "the old order" is gone, to be replaced by a "new terrain".

> "Much of the old order took its form from the mass production pioneered by Ford, and has become known as 'Fordism'. The new era can be called 'post-Fordism' . . . : on what terms will this new order be created?"

"Thatcherism" is, of course, condemned for combining "individualism" with "authoritarianism", for sanctioning "the marketisation of society" and "cultural racism". But, but . . .

> "It well understands that politics is about building alliances. It does not rely on a single class: it has constructed an alliance of different social forces behind its conservative modernisation. . . ."

The Labour Party, on the other hand:

> ". . . does not recognise that the crisis of socialism is . . . a failure to modernise itself alongside the social and economic forces behind the creation of the new order . . . too often the Labour Party seeks to substitute itself for broad social movements."

The accent is to be on "a mix of decentralised initiatives and strategic direction"—a whirlwind of concentric "strategies" to meet "new demands" from "new social forces":

> "The Left needs to fashion a strategy which articulates these demands within a social economy strategy, as an alternative to enterprise culture and popular capitalism."

All this in the name of "socialism", whatever that is or may be. (Gorbachov's reference to "humanitarianism", in his Guildhall speech on his visit to Britain, turned the noxious into platitude.) On this issue a certain dampness and secular piety sets in. For a last brief section indicates that paradise may well be in for long postponement. It does not quite say so, but only the younger readers of *Marxism Today* can expect to be around at the time:

> "It is important to locate this strategy along the road to socialism. Socialism will not be made in Britain in the 1990's or the first decade of the next century by this strategy. There will be distinctive stages in the development of society towards socialism. . . ."

ONE MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT that, given the Communist Party's dismal, often appalling history in Britain, such a minor and banal affair would warrant scant attention. Indeed, if the wicked capitalist press were doing its imputed duty, it would first "rubbish" it and then bury it.

Not so . . . not by a long chalk. Commentators welcomed this loose assemblage of "strategies" as a modish form of designer socialism—a socialism that, as the ancient Greeks might have put it, is a socialism that is "not-a-socialism". For example, Michael Jones, political editor of *The Sunday Times*, felt (28 August 1988) that the document recognised the changes brought about by "Thatcher", to which the Labour Party has failed to adjust. He welcomed "the new breed of yuppie, anti-Stalinist reformists" who "have taken over"—adding, with no sign of disapproval: ". . . today's Communist strategists enjoy greater political influence than their predecessors ever dreamed of". (If Jones says so, then it must be true. He is, I repeat, a political editor—allowed full editorial freedom by Rupert Murdoch. . . .) He then offered some extraordinary advice to Neil Kinnock:

Donald Maclean (*A Divided Life*, 1988, p. 17) writes that he was "the one who exerted great influence" on young Maclean's thinking, and "until his death in 1977 he continued to exert great influence on young people coming into the movement". According to Peter Wright (*Spycatcher*, 1988, p. 249), he "took his secrets to the grave". That is not unusual. But the range and quantity of those secrets must have been spectacular, going well beyond the mundane tedium of editing a journal.

Andrew Boyle, in *The Climate of Treason* (rev. ed. 1980, p. 345), writes of Klugmann's "total commitment to Stalinism" and, referring to his role in wartime Yugoslavia, to his long service "as a Soviet apparatchik, most effectively, while masquerading as an army major and staff officer. . . ." Klugmann the Cambridge recruiter figures centrally in Michael Straight's *After Long Silence* (1983)—a most revealing memoir of the 1930s and after. There is a minor mystery in that several writers (including Boyle and Straight) persist in spelling his name as Klugman.

[5] These appointees were Beatrix Campbell, Marian Darke, Martin Jacques, Bill Innes, Monty Johnstone, Paula Lanning, Charles Leadbeater (labour correspondent of the *Financial Times*), and Jeff Rodrigues, with Margaret Woodis as secretary. Piquantly, Darke, Innes, and Johnstone subsequently issued a note of dissent, saying that ". . . as we were away we did not see the final draft until after it had gone to the printers". New Times indeed! Those writing in the "New Times" issue were Robin Murray, Charles Leadbeater, Rosalind Brunt, Stuart Hall, and John Urry. The "special Communist Party supplement" and the "New Times" issue can fairly be described as overlapping.

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> ". . . the Labour leader could do worse than lift the ban on Communists joining his party: they could help him to turn outwards as they have. Doctrinally they are as pragmatic as he is. Organisationally they could take on both the hard-left and the union stick-in-the-muds."

I found this suggestion bizarre; but, after all, it was not addressed to me. I do not know how Mr Kinnock responded to it, but I could tell Mr Jones the brief Anglo-Saxon response such advice would have got from Attlee and Gaitskell, not to mention Lords Wilson and Callaghan.

So much for September. A month later came the big one—right on cue for the 1988 Labour Party Conference and Mr Bryan Gould's appearance at the *Marxism Today* fringe meeting.[6] In the October issue a group of *Marxism Today* pundits launched a series on what they called "New Times": and the debate has continued in subsequent months. (Nobody, it seems, has recalled that a monthly periodical entitled *New Times* has been published in Moscow since 1943, in many languages.) They offered the customary imprecations about "Thatcher", but the focus was on the social changes that flowed from micro-chip technology and associated shifts in fashion, style, and culture.

From the start, the argument branched out from politics and economics into issues of modernism and postmodernism in art, architecture, and literature. In search of a socialism more closely linked to "popular pleasures", Stuart Hall quickly asked: "Are we thinking dialectically enough?" Answers to that kind of question normally range from "No" to "Too much". And it is hard to see how any level of dialectical thought can bring real people closer to really popular pleasures. . . . Hall also agonised that:

> "The Left seems not just displaced by Thatcherism, but disabled, flattened, becalmed by the very prospect of change; afraid of rooting itself in 'the new' and unable to make the leap of imagination required to engage the future."

That, of course, is bad news to him (and, in proportion, good news for me). But Hall finds comfort in the writings of Frederick Jameson and Marshall Berman (and wary readers at that point probably prepared to run for cover, fearing the dread giants of deconstruction, post-structuralism, *et hoc genus omne*). He also gears his cultural news of a world of shifting, often packaged styles into a reappraisal of sexual and ethnic identity. He is aware of "disjunctions" between realms, all linked to the "hegemonic tendencies" of Thatcherism, whose "project" (favourite word in these quarters):

> ". . . is operating on the ground of longer, more profound movements which *appear* to be going its way, but of which it is only occasionally in command. . . ."

The trick would be for the Left to catch the tide of those "movements" and turn them against "Thatcher". The trend-line was clear. Post-Fordism means goodbye to the old cloth-cap working class and hello to the consumer culture, in a market now not just for styles but for sensitive public services. But mass-consumption patterns will vanish with mass production. Running through the new age will be a skein of diversified tastes and their satisfaction by diversified means. Thus the Left cannot ignore the inroads made by "Thatcher" into the pre-1979 pattern of collectivism. On the contrary, it must grapple to satisfy real individuals through a new, more consumer-oriented sense of the collective. There was (as one writer was later to argue) a shift "from strong to weak power forms of control . . . still resisted by those in all areas who cling to more heavy-handed forms of control".[7]

By the issue for January 1989 the time was ripe for another bite at the cultural cherry: postmodernism and its high priests were given further and extended attention. That is the place to go if you seek light from Baudrillard or ruminations on style. You should bring a good dictionary. For example, Dick Hebdige, in his article "After the Masses", upbraids Thatcherism for trying

> ". . . to hegemonise the long-term movements, described, though differently inflected, under the rubrics of new times and post modernism within its project of 'regressive modernisation'."

He commends *Marxism Today* for having argued for years:

> ". . . for a definition of the political as a 'war of position' in which absolutely nothing is given or guaranteed. Such a 'marxism without guarantees' has already dispensed with Lyotard's 'meta-narratives'. . . ."

Well, well. So now we know. But what do we know, if "absolutely nothing is given"? At least we are tempted to *feel* if not to "know" that the de-Leninised, post-Fordist "marxism" may have a rather shaky imprimatur.

THE "NEW TIMES" THEME had been trailed well ahead. As early as 14 February 1988, Martin Jacques had keyed the words into the title of his regular *Sunday Times* column: "Unions must lift their horizons for new times." Trade-union rumblings in the winter of 1988 were of a different order to "the winter of discontent" which proved "the deathknell of the last Labour government. The political and economic times are utterly different." Strikes nowadays could have a strategic purpose—disputes like those then current over nurses' pay or the wage settlement at Ford were not "simply about pay". They could (or should) be about "how change is introduced, how it is controlled, what it means for the workers". During the industrial unrest in the summer of 1989, British commuters saw what this can mean.

By 24 March (this time in *The Guardian*, while Hugo Young was on holiday) Jacques was concerned over Mrs

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[6] In the course of a separate round-table discussion (*Marxism Today*, October 1988) Bryan Gould observed:

> "Now the one difference between the CP document and what we have to grapple with in the Labour party is that the CP travels light. The Labour Party . . . can't—nor should it, in my view—so easily jettison some of the old structures, the old ideas, the old values. . . . As a Dagenham MP I can hardly rejoice in the demise of Fordism in the same way that others might!"

"The one difference": am I alone in finding this a very odd remark indeed?

[7] See Geoff Mulgen's article, "The Power of the Weak", in *Marxism Today* (December 1988) and the extensive excerpts in *The Guardian* (28 November 1988).

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Thatcher's claim that she and her colleagues had written "the epitaph for socialism". (Given the well-documented achievements of socialism, this could be no bad thing; nor was Mrs Thatcher's claim, though bold and provocative, entirely a surprise.) But his main worry was that the Labour Party, then working through its statement of aims and values, seems "out of time" in contrast with Thatcherism's "brazen confidence", rooted in its conviction that "history is on its side". The theme of "time" is hammered home throughout. Tribute is therefore paid—however grudgingly—to Thatcherism's "sense of modern times" and its ability "to articulate a political strategy which has appropriated those times for itself. . . . The political and intellectual universe in which Labour lives and breathes—the 1945 model—is dead. . . ."

What, then, is so "new" in what Thatcher manipulates and Labour finds so hard to grasp?

> ". . . the defining characteristic of the new world is the disappearance of the old forms of mass production, and the rise of computer-based flexible specialisation coupled with the decline of manufacturing itself. The Labour movement was built on the former: its labour force, its culture, its sexism, its politics. These changes represent the overturning of the material and social conditions of socialist politics over the last 70 or more years."

The first sentence sums up the idea at the heart of the new initiative. It is not a blinding insight: indeed, it is part of the wider discussion, in "bourgeois sociology", of post-industrial society. But much is made of it and, as we have seen, it is given the label of "post-Fordism", in contrast to "Fordism"—broadly, the techniques of assembly-line production of the "older" industrial order, heralded by Henry Ford over 60 years ago. The word "Fordism" has an interesting origin, and a more interesting recent career. It appears to have seen the light in 1934 in the famous *Prison Notebooks* of the Italian Communist leader, Antonio Gramsci.[8] For some 55 years, it had lain fairly low, except for some occasional academic usage. But less than six months after the idea had been built into "New Times", it had travelled—together with "post-Fordism"—from a Communist Party journal on to a British prime-time TV documentary: Channel 4's *Next Left* (3 March 1989). By any standards, that was fast propagation—complete with Stuart Hall himself on screen! Gramsci would be proud of his admirers. Who needs grubby leaflets or secret couriers? These days, with a little bit of luck, you can deliver your Marxism straight into the living-room. (Would Stuart Hall regard this triumph, and his personal appearance, as a branch of "popular pleasures"?)

"Post-Fordism", of course, is not just a code-word for social changes: it is also a slogan for action. The running theme of the "New Times" debate is that Mrs Thatcher has been able to cash in on social change. Given that some (how many?) of her policies are in tune with "the times", and that some outcomes may be irreversible, such allegedly Thatcherite motifs as "the market" could be deployed in the service of a new—because "socialist"—version of the post-industrial society. *Next Left* pointed to Red Bologna—where Gramsci's Party presides over jolly Communist entrepreneurs running a modern technology and decentralised social services.

For benighted Britain, however, that is all in the future. For the present, even where Lenin's name is not invoked, there is the Leninist question: "What is to be done?"—What has to be done is to ensure the defeat of "Thatcher".[9] Since this is so—and was so clearly stated—it is remarkable that the "New Times" campaign (like "Facing Up To The Future") was greeted with a rush of praise and, again, advice for the Labour leader—from normally sensible and non-Leftist quarters. Simon Jenkins (in *The Sunday Times* of 27 November 1988), described *Marxism Today* as "the only magazine which seems able to grub intellectual nourishment from the dusty wilderness of left-wing thought". A week later in the same pages Brian Walden went further still. He never thought he would "live to praise communists for their open-mindedness, flexibility and acute perception of how capitalism is developing. . . . Communists used to be dogmatists and bigots of the deepest dye", but:

> ". . . much contemporary communist writing is calm, measured and largely bereft of the hysteria that disfigures the rest of the anti-Thatcher opposition. . . . *Marxism Today* is far and away the best socialist journal in the land. [Labour shows no insights into] how to run a modern capitalist economy, because it is not sure it believes in running one. Were I Kinnock I would be sorely tempted to declare unilateral intellectual disarmament, suspend the policy review and send for *Marxism Today*."

All these Sunday testimonials (and the gratuitous advice for Neil Kinnock) seem quite out of proportion. It could be, though I doubt it, that Walden seeks to drive Kinnock crazy by exposing him to a diet of postmodernism, Gramsci, Baudrillard, and Frederick Jameson; or to destabilise Roy Hattersley and Gerald Kaufman with dizzy talk of "hegemonic projects". Such a menu may go down well in Polytechnic canteens, but it is an implausible passport into offices of State.

THE "NEW TIMES" post-Fordist themes are a backhanded tribute to Thatcher and a kick in the teeth for "Labourism". But the chic talk about post-structuralism, language, or modern architecture is a top-dressing—absorbing what Daniel Bell once called "the leisure of the theory class". . . . One must avoid getting into a technical argument with such people—about, say, the meaning of class or the distinction between "subjective" and "objective". That way lies diversion—in several senses of the word. For practical people the intended message is quite simple: what "Thatcher" has achieved through exploiting "New Times" has, first, to be understood, and then used as a way

[8] Antonio Gramsci, "Americanismo e Fordismo", in *Quaderni del Carcere* (ed. Gerratana, Turin, 1975), pp. 2, 137-82.

[9] Over the months there has been some oscillation over whether Labour alone can do the job. Commentators have been known to swing with the opinion polls but the main thrust seems to be "Labour Can't Win: the Case for an Electoral Pact"—the slogan emblazoned on the cover of *Marxism Today* for February 1989.

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of forming an alliance against her. Such an "alliance of progressive forces" is a standard Communist ploy—whether it is called Popular Front, Broad Left, New Times, or whatever comes after.

I must sadly record that not all of the "New Times" phase is marked by the open-mindedness admired by Brian Walden. Look, for example, at some of the thoughts of Eric Hobsbawm, a member of long standing of the *Marxism Today* editorial board. He did not himself contribute to the "New Times" issue of the journal, but parts of it echo in his writings, and indeed some of those writings prefigure the theme. In April 1988, the target was very clear:

> ". . . the curious but dangerous, Thatcherite combination of right-wing stalinism (uncontrolled central state power) and the right wing anarchism of the ideologues. . . . [Getting rid of Thatcherism]. . . is a task that will increasingly unite people in this country across the lines of class, gender, colour and political parties, including the Conservative Party."[10]

This is a modern version of the 1930s Popular Front, with "Thatcher" in the firing line rather than Hitler. On the one hand, Hobsbawm concedes that fascism in the 1930s was "a very different species of political animal"; on the other hand, "Thatcher" is seen as a functional equivalent for fascism—"an experimental model for post-democratic bourgeois society in the 1980s".

By July 1988, Eric Hobsbawm was offering *Guardian* readers a further look at the Labour Party's policy review. This was more upbeat about Labour's potential. He had some qualified words of approval for a recent speech on social ownership by Bryan Gould, which was "not a sell-out of socialism but a concise and well-argued case for the superiority of common ownership as well as an exploration of the wide range of methods available to advance a mixed economy in the desired direction". But he included a bizarre and extravagant scenario. When Thatcher departs, Britain would face a near-apocalypse:

> "Like Germany in 1945 Britain after Thatcher will be a scene of destruction. Those who will need to rebuild what has to be reconstructed—not necessarily in the same way as before—need a preliminary survey of the bomb-damage . . . but nobody has sketched the general picture."[11]

Presumably the "New Times" saga is part of such a sketch.

Is this the sort of stuff Brian Walden considers flexible and acute, calm, measured and free of hysteria? Or does he marvel, as I do, at the insolence of a Fellow of the British Academy who has been a Communist since the 1930s, deploys the loosely defined concept of "right-wing stalinism", and becomes excited like this about "bomb-damage"? At the very least Hobsbawm needs to borrow an undamaged crystal ball. . . .

The saga continues. Fortified by praise from such unexpected quarters "New Times" has now been discussed (and expanded) by the Party's Executive Committee. In its new form it will be submitted to the Congress planned for late November 1989.

IN MANY WAYS all this is passing strange. Here we have a highly minority party which, allowed to forget its Stalinist past, is no longer shunned like the plague by Labour leaders, and is welcomed, indeed, by many people as preferable to the (much less significant) "ultra-Left". Its "revisionist" manoeuvres get much favourable media coverage.

Why are its self-nominated gurus treated, by and large, with such deference? Are their thoughts, even when fully comprehensible, as novel or acceptable as is claimed? Or is their attraction in so many quarters that they rationalise (yes . . . and sociologise) hatred for "Thatcher"—and are reaching places that other sages on the Left have never reached? Even the poststructural patter, by its apparent profundity, may find some takers in the anti-Thatcher camp.

Some may feel it wrong to take such matters seriously or to give them further and unsolicited publicity. Others may be unnerved by a very potent source of emotional blackmail. For shouts about McCarthyism—irrelevant and dishonest as they are—can still greet any unflattering account of "Left" ideas. "Anti-Communist" is a pejorative term, even (perhaps especially) for some Conservatives: it is too "American" for some of them, and for others it suggests an unwelcome interest in grubby ideas. They forget that politics comes at many levels.

One of those levels is the formation of opinion, especially among the chattering classes who are always so anxious for novelty. They should remember, too, that the spreading of "new" opinions is a long-term, steady-drip process—literally "propaganda". . . . In the last decade, as ideas like that of "enterprise culture" have gained wide currency, much opinion has been, broadly, tilted rightwards. That is why so many "liberal" intellectuals are so enraged; and why they wait impatiently for the tide to turn. Such rage, combined with a little perversity, can be infectious. Erstwhile young fogies on the Right also feel uneasy at the pace or tone of "the Thatcher Revolution".

Given the Left wing's general poverty of ideas, there was bound to be an opening for new initiatives—indeed for anything that could tilt opinions in a different direction. *Marxism Today* is well placed to feed on discontents: it would gladly provide a rallying-point for fastidious royalists, alienated bourgeois, Greens, and all who may come. It is an odd messenger for a political truism—that an alliance across opposition party lines is what would turn new times into good times for the Left.

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[10] It is no surprise that Eric Hobsbawm would like to build a broad anti-Thatcherite alliance: he said that loud and clear prior to Labour's disastrous third defeat in 1987.

[11] This analysis seems to have upset Michael Jones (*Sunday Times*, 17 July 1988): ". . . such allusions are surely grotesque". Jones went so far as to say:

> ". . . the distress of left-wing intellectuals at the state of Thatcherite Britain has finally passed the point of paranoia. . . . The precise moment of the crossover into paranoia was registered last week in their foremost outlet, *The Guardian*, by Professor Eric Hobsbawm, their foremost member."

This was a very severe diagnosis. Is Jones medically qualified as well as being a political editor? And why, within a month, was he recommending for membership of the Labour Party persons believed to be paranoid?

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FROM THE OTHER SHORE

Ideological Noise

By Paul Hollander

FROM MY EARLIEST DAYS as a student of Soviet society, I have been baffled by the lack of interest which Western specialists show towards Soviet propaganda. From the earliest days of the Soviet system, propaganda was a massive, obtrusive, and ubiquitous presence—a relentless effort on the part of the authorities, reflected in the investment of vast resources and manpower. But it is difficult to find monographs devoted to the topic, and one may search major texts on the Soviet Union in vain for any substantial reference. Western journalists and politicians have been no more interested than the scholars; all failed to recognise the enormous scope of the enterprise, both in its domestic and in its foreign aspects.

Is there a connection between such indifference and the corresponding dismissal of the significance of "ideology" which is regularly encountered in Western studies of the USSR? After all, much propaganda is applied ideology, or is inspired by ideology—it consists of the dissemination of an official line, however crude or vulgar this may be.

Belittling the importance of ideology in Soviet politics has been congenial to both a critical and a sympathetic view of the Soviet system. Critics could argue that ideology had been reduced to slogans which had no relationship to real objectives, that what passed for ideology was a travesty of the original ideals. Sympathisers could find relief in alleging its unimportance, since this would indicate that the system had abandoned its zealous commitment to messianic and missionary goals; that it was ready to lapse into less threatening, more conventional great-power behaviour, to accept the global status quo, and to seek accommodation with the West.

It was argued that most Soviet policies, domestic or foreign, were determined above all by historical traditions and aspirations, or alternatively that modernisation combined with great-power aspirations was the key to understanding the Soviet system. In view of the frequent and sometimes dramatic shifts in the Party line (and a corresponding opportunistic reinterpretation of the sacred doctrines), it has been claimed that ideology could not be taken seriously as a determinant of policy. All such arguments have elements of truth. But I believe they fail to grasp the unique role played by ideology in the exercise of power, the self-vindication of the ruling élites, and the bolstering of their political will.

Since Soviet history has consisted in great part of political violence and coercion, there has seemed to the West to be little point in studying its propaganda, which after all sought to mould the behaviour of its citizens in non-violent ways, through persuasion, when in reality both Soviet rule and the overt conformity of the citizen rested on intimidation and regimentation. (What we call "regimentation", others may designate more gently as "mass mobilisation", which in turn shades into intrusive propaganda.) It was rarely asked, or explained, why the Soviet régime should bother to pour vast resources into propaganda if it could attain its objectives through the formidable institutions of coercion which were both readily available and lavishly relied upon. More often than not, such propaganda was seen by the West as a peculiar Soviet ritual or reflex, an odd institutional compulsion which served hardly any discernible purpose.

Western students of Soviet affairs have not been anxious to immerse themselves in the study of something which was so painfully boring and repetitive, and which promised no great revelations. Anglo-Saxon students of politics especially have in general been sceptical about propaganda as the source of any powerful influence. In the West's more rationalist view of the world, there are narrow limits to the manipulability of human behaviour; the liberal tradition resists the idea that people can be diverted by mere words from pursuing their genuine interests.

One has to go back to 1953 and the publication of Nathan Leites's monumental and neglected *A Study of Bolshevism* to find an example of serious concern with the animating ideas of the Soviet leaders and their belief in the linkage of ideology with propaganda.

THE SITUATION I have described is all the more puzzling since, during World War II and after, the propaganda techniques of the Nazis attracted considerable attention from specialists and the media, while the public at large displayed a morbid fascination with the phenomenon. Many believed Nazi propaganda to be an important and effective tool—a devilishly cunning and skilful instrument of manipulation and control, and a key to Nazi successes. It seemed plausible that an evil system, which could not possibly have any rational appeal, could only seize and retain power if it managed to trick and deceive.

Nazism as a whole became, in Western eyes, intrinsically linked with the colourful and vivid propaganda which enthralled the masses, encapsulating the evil essence of the system and its messages of hate. The War made it even more imperative to pay attention to the propaganda of a ruthless and clever enemy, whereas concern with the Moscow-Washington Cold War (and the part which propaganda played in it) was short-lived and, since the death of Stalin, obscured by wishful thinking.

Soviet propaganda, however, played a part no less (and possibly more) important in the establishment and maintenance of the Soviet system. Peter Kenez makes this unmistak-

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ably clear in his study of what he calls the Soviet "propaganda state"—an impressive addition (based predominantly on primary sources) to the limited Western literature.[1]

Some people may be under the impression that, like all bad things associated with the system, Soviet propaganda was invented by Stalin. Kenez, however, carefully documents its crucial importance in establishing and consolidating the system between 1917-29—the years preceding Stalin's domination—and examines in detail its formative period, focusing on the press, book publishing, cinema, posters, varieties of political education, and literacy campaigns. Especially illuminating are his efforts to convey the experience of those who were exposed to it—he marshals abundant evidence to sustain his assertion that "The régime could not have existed without its special brand of propaganda", and concludes that "propaganda played a large role in the 1917 victory of the Communists and an even greater part in their ability to retain their power during the . . . 1917-1921 Civil War. . . ."

UNFORTUNATELY, neither Kenez's study nor its few predecessors[2]—or current efforts such as the annual reports of the US Department of State, which painstakingly catalogue Soviet propaganda campaigns and organisations abroad[3]—succeeded in increasing scholarly or public appreciation of its importance. This state of affairs has its more distant roots in the attitudes toward the Soviet Union which prevailed in the West during the 1930s and World War II. It simply would not have seemed proper in those days to dwell on the nature of Soviet propaganda techniques and their contribution to the maintenance of the system. In the West, propaganda has always been associated with deception of some kind and degree, and its peoples—more in control of their lives, and leading a less politicised existence—are disinclined to give much weight to what propaganda may accomplish. They do not see political attitudes as quite so easily manipulated, despite the recurring campaigns which "sell Presidents" on American and European television. But of course the experience of such electoral propaganda is not transferable: "campaign commercials" do not help us to understand a propaganda which at one and the same time was self-congratulatory and demanded further exertion and sacrifice from its audience.

Western political propaganda reflects the pluralism of the political culture in which it is generated. Soviet propaganda also mirrored its setting; hence it remained monolithic in content, enjoying an uncontested monopoly over all means of public communication. Backed by the power of the state, it articulated official values which could not safely be challenged in public, and this lack of open challenge imparted a freedom from restraint in redefining or boldly misrepresenting reality: in such a thoroughly uncompetitive environment, mendacity could take flight. The possibility of coercive sanctions against non-conformity strengthened rather than weakened its impact, for the alternative to being "persuaded" might mean the loss of one's job, promotion, a housing or residence permit; in more serious cases it could involve committal to a psychiatric hospital or a "corrective labour camp". These are powerful incentives for aligning overt behaviour with the messages and suggestions of propaganda.

If, in the opinion of Dr Herbert Marcuse and his still numerous followers, it was "repressive tolerance" which assured stability in the West, in the Soviet Union repressive *in*tolerance—embodied in the coordination of propaganda and coercion—yielded more spectacular results and secured a durable conformity. As Adam Ulam observed in 1979, in his *Unfinished Revolution*,[4] "To the degree that the régime has reduced its dependence on terror, it has felt constrained to increase its emphasis on the other major prop of its power, ideological illusion-making."

THE RISE OF GORBACHOV, with its associated hopes for the liberalisation of Soviet society, further diminished Western public interest in Soviet propaganda. In the euphoria of *glasnost* and the prevailing benefit-of-the-doubt attitudes towards the Soviet authorities, people forgot that, for instance, it was under Gorbachov that the Soviet *agit-prop* apparatus launched one of its most remarkable campaigns of disinformation—designed to persuade global audiences that AIDS was the result of American experiments in biological warfare and that the US was working on biological weapons specifically designed to kill blacks and/or Arabs. We do not know if President Reagan during his cordial meetings with Gorbachov broached such matters; a reverential television interviewer (Tom Brokaw) certainly avoided topics of this kind during his nation-wide NBC broadcast.

Probably the most fundamental source of Western incomprehension of Soviet propaganda and its central role in the exercise of political power is unawareness of the fact that in Soviet political culture it has never been viewed with the distaste characteristic of Western liberal societies. In Soviet political discourse, propaganda has been a perfectly honourable and respectable concept (thanks largely to Lenin and his genius for *agit-prop*); the government or the ruling party has never had to engage in it apologetically, surreptitiously, or half-heartedly.

Nor has it been widely realised that the rise of Soviet propaganda and "the propaganda state" was virtually predetermined by the circumstances under which the Bolshevik system came into existence. The replacement of historical determinism (of Marx's variety) by the new guiding doctrine of voluntarism—that is, the theory of the critical role of the revolutionary-political élite and its political will—played an essential part in the emergence of Soviet propaganda and

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[1] Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization 1917-1929* (University of California Press, 1985).

[2] The most notable among the small number of such works are Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (1950), and Frederick Barghoorn's studies of *Soviet Foreign Propaganda* (1964) and *The Soviet Image of the United States* (1969). See also David Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (1975); Barukh Hazen, *Soviet Impregnational Propaganda* (1976); and Roy Godson and Richard Shultz, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (1984).

[3] See, for instance, *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-87* (Department of State, Washington D.C., 1987).

[4] Adam Ulam, *The Unfinished Revolution* (1979).

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its contribution to the exercise of state power. The sluggish forces of history had to be replaced or supplemented by human will and organisation. After all, the Soviet system was not irresistibly propelled into power by the overwhelming, elemental support of the masses and especially of a large, class-conscious, industrial working class. Nor has it stayed in power by relying on such support. The masses, at every step along the road to power, and during its consolidation, had to be prodded, cajoled, deceived, exhorted, or "persuaded"—hence the unique role of propaganda and the steady demand for its services.

THE SOVIET SYSTEM introduced early in its existence an innovation which was quite foreign to Westerners. "Persuasion" Soviet-style differed from the Western rational-liberal notion of changing minds by argument. The Soviet goal was not so much to bring about an alteration in the world view of their audiences by thrusting upon them new information and argument; rather, as Adam Ulam has pointed out, Soviet propaganda ". . . might be described as ideological noise, intended to crowd out any voices of protest or doubt and to stultify minds into conformity". Or, as Peter Kenez puts it:

> "The main achievement of the Soviet régime was something negative: it succeeded in preventing the formation and articulation of alternative points of view. The Soviet people ultimately came not so much to believe the Bolsheviks' world view as to take it for granted. . . . In circumstances where only one point of view can be expressed, the distinction between belief and non-belief and truth and untruth is washed away."

Simon Leys's forceful summary of the basic principles of Chinese propaganda under Mao[5] highlights the basic similarity between the goals of totalitarian propaganda:

> "It soon becomes obvious that this gigantic enterprise . . . is animated . . . by frightfully rigorous and coherent intention. The aim is to anaesthetise critical intelligence, purge the brain, and inject the cement of official ideology into the emptied skull; once hardened, this will leave no room for the introduction of any new idea and will oppose its compact, amorphous and watertight mass to any intellectual operation that would be autonomous or heterodox."

Among the sturdy roots of Soviet propaganda, reference must also be made to Lenin's highly pessimistic view of human nature. The workers were prone to "trade-union consciousness": that is, they put their short-term economic interests before grandiose schemes of social and political transformation. Peasants were beyond the pale as far as political consciousness was concerned. Intellectuals, unless closely disciplined by the Party, were not to be trusted either. Lenin and his successors were haunted by fears of "spontaneity"—a concept which held no romantic connotations, but signified human fallibility and mindless, short-sighted political action. If the people were untrustworthy to begin with—and if the institutional-structural transformations in Soviet society failed to raise their political consciousness adequately—all the more reason for the generous use of propaganda to provide guidance for these benighted masses.[6]

In more recent times, contempt and condescension have remained embedded in Soviet propaganda, especially when it was aimed at Western public opinion.

HOW IMPORTANT is Soviet propaganda today? For the most part monolithic, dull, and repetitive (boring old *Pravda*), it could in the final analysis always rely on the organs of state security to provide reinforcement of its message (inside the Soviet Union, at any rate).

Unlike much of the propaganda of Nazi Germany, it demanded of its citizens attitudes or forms of behaviour which do not come naturally: hard work; discipline; the surrender of personal to "public" interest; deferred gratification. For example, May Day slogans (now, as in the past) exhort the population and its various strata:

> "Be in the vanguard of restructuring! Display activeness and innovation in work! Struggle with revolutionary persistence. . . . Persistently deepen restructuring. . . . Increase labour productivity. . . . Ensure the fulfilment of plans. . . . Increase effectiveness. . . . Strengthen discipline. . . . Master up-to-date methods . . . . Increase political activeness. . . . Increase the role of socialist competition. . . . More fully satisfy the spiritual needs of the Soviet people. . . . Protect the gains of socialism!"[7]

This is not to say that Soviet propaganda is limited to such exhortations, or that Soviet propagandists do not provide opportunities for pleasurable scapegoating, buttressing a sense of collective self-righteousness which is far from alien to the Russian masses. In the words of George Feiffer in 1981, ". . . skilful selection, misrepresentation and jingoistic distortion of news effectively manipulates the Russians' propensity to see their long-suffering selves as the injured party in world affairs".[8] Such considerations may help us to understand the enduring commitment to otherwise peculiar notions of "provocation" (e.g. in the penetration of Soviet air space by the Korean airliner, in charges of "Western agents" financing the ethnic disorders).

Soviet propaganda gives us insight into the persisting secular-religious aspects of the system which produced it, and especially into deeply-rooted and fervently held concepts of good and evil in a political universe pervaded by danger and hostility.

> "One core idea that has remained [was] a perception of a devious, conspiratorial enemy . . . hidden to outsiders. To those to whom a 'capitalist' world is engaged in per-

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[5] Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (1977).

[6] As Peter Kenez writes:

> "The major elements in the Bolshevik ideological heritage were a clear understanding of the important role of ideas in history and a belief that some people knew better than others; therefore it was unwise to allow people to look after their own interests. . . ."

[7] "The CPSU Central Committee's Slogans for May Day 1987", *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 27 May 1987, p. 11.

[8] George Feiffer, "Russian Disorders", *Harper's Magazine*, February 1981, p. 55.

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manent conspiracy against the Soviet Union and who see need . . . for a counter-conspiracy against these forces of darkness, the Communist usage of 'provocation' becomes meaningful and natural."[9]

The Soviet Union always made sharp and clearly-thought-out distinctions between domestic propaganda and foreign targets and campaigns. Public opinion abroad remained unaware of the gap that separated these different themes; citizens of the West, for instance, are not in a position to notice the contrast between a shrill domestic militarism and the soft pleadings for universal peace which are beamed at the world outside.

The diligence and thoroughness imparted to Soviet propaganda campaigns conflicted with an increasingly widespread Western image of the Soviet Union as a lethargic, problem-ridden, status-quo power, anxious to attend to pressing domestic needs and weaknesses. But there is reason to believe that—after the Military Establishment and the *KGB*—it is the Propaganda Apparatus that is the most lavishly funded of all Soviet institutions. Moreover, propaganda and *KGB* activities increasingly overlap in the world of "disinformation" and "active measures" (the latter defined by the US State Department as "covert or deceptive operations conducted in support of Soviet foreign policy . . . to influence opinions and/or actions of individuals, governments and/or publics"). This continues.

A further differentiation between foreign and domestic versions emerged in the 1980s. While domestic propaganda had changed little in substance, format, and inventiveness, the quality of propaganda aimed at foreign audiences, and especially those in the West, certainly improved. Over the decades, Soviet propagandists took few pains to enliven their themes and methods for the domestic audience, presumably because informed consent of the citizens was not among the preconditions of retaining power. In the 1980s, however, they paid greater attention to Western public opinion and became more adept at telling Western audiences what they wanted to hear. Soviet spokesmen like Vladimir Posner or Georgi Arbatov, who can address American audiences in their own language—and are given ample and regular access to the American media of mass communication—represented a new departure. At the same time a reciprocal process has been at work: Western audiences—for reasons quite independent of Soviet efforts—have become far more susceptible to Soviet propaganda, and especially to peace propaganda and the challenge to help an ailing economy.

There have been substantive innovations in the messages aimed at the West, as Richard Pipes noted in his comments about Gorbachov's *Perestroika* (1987), a book produced for Western consumption: "Its purpose is . . . to persuade [Western publics] that the Soviet Union, in its structure and aspirations, is not essentially different from their own societies"[10]—a message diametrically opposed to that which is daily fed to the Soviet people, assuring them of the moral, cultural, economic, and political distinctiveness and superiority of their system over the corrupt and decadent West.

Paradoxically, Soviet propagandists now seem inclined to take greater liberties with foreign audiences. Take, for instance, Gorbachov's book, which Pipes describes as aimed at

"a very low level, one that Soviet experts must have decided represents the common Western denominator of ignorance and wishful thinking. Not the least depressing feature of this work, hailed by *The New York Times* as the 'international publishing event of the year', is what it reveals of the Soviet establishment's contempt for the West."

Of late, an increasing number of cracks have appeared on the monolithic façade of the Soviet political system. It is no longer possible for Soviet propagandists to portray it as radiating seamless harmony, basking in the undivided, unanimous support of all sectors and groups of the population. Not only the televised polemics at the recent Party Congress, or published disagreements between functionaries about the limits of reform, but divergent interpretations of domestic difficulties and cautious questioning of certain foreign policies in the press, together with stepped-up criticism of various institutional defects, signal the possibility that the Soviet propaganda state is being altered, in some measure. Past crimes are being admitted, but present criminals remain unmentionable.

Yet, without some familiarity with the themes and institutions of its propaganda, the Soviet polity remains incomprehensible. Throughout its history the exertions of propaganda have lent distinctiveness to a system which, while no longer classically totalitarian, has yet to transform itself into a state which makes more modest demands on its citizens, while renouncing ideological claims and the associated impulse to seek legitimation in projecting its power outside its boundaries. A decline in the volume, uniformity, and mendacity of Soviet propaganda could be a fairly accurate gauge of any substantive transformation of the Soviet political system and its goals.

[9] Werner Cohn, "'A Clear Provocation'—Esoteric Elements in Communist Language", ENCOUNTER, May 1985.

[10] Richard Pipes, "Where is Glasnost?", *Wall Street Journal*, December 1987, p. 34.

Note to Readers

The next issue of ENCOUNTER will be a combined January-February number, published on 20 January. We will continue to publish ten numbers per year, but there will in future be only one combined summer issue (July-August), instead of two as has been the case previously.

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MUSIC

A Suitable Case for Treatment?

Wagnerphobia—By I. S. GILLESPIE

WAGNERPHOBIA is an eccentric social phenomenon. It cannot be explained by the much publicised facts that Wagner wore silk dressing-gowns, committed adultery, wrote sensuous music, and sniped at the Jews. Wagner-champions, ingenuously drawn into a rational consideration of these issues, produce mitigating circumstances. Wagner suffered from a tiresome skin-disease. His disciple deposited an unwanted wife in his lap. His music brought a romantic trend to a majestic and unrepeatable culmination. Sniping at one's immediate professional rivals, if carried no further, is a legitimate component of free speech: gadfly bites gadfly. All of this falls on deaf ears, for Wagnerphobia is a religious, not a secular event, and does not lend itself to logical analysis.

Only by presenting a religious threat could the Old Magician of Bayreuth have become anathema to a modern theocratic State, and provided a yearly meal of breath-takingly *ad hominem* criticism for the prestigious *New York Review of Books*. Thrusting one's knife into the long-dead corpse has become so much of an institution that one non-aligned critic was moved to quote Shakespeare's claim for Caesar—"Oh Richard Wagner, thou art mighty yet!" But why, one may well add, should Wagner's spirit "haunt our halls and turn our swords in our own proper entrails"? Was Wagner remotely successful in a monstrous pagan revivalism? Did he even attempt a politico-religious coup?

Certainly, when not pressed into service as a contemporary henchman of Adolf Hitler, he is most familiarly represented by a massive, tonsil-exposing Nordic goddess. (Wagner's response to this pervasive image was: "If I see another winged helmet, I shall puke!") Wagner's gold-corrupted Norse gods, it is usually forgotten, were brought on the stage to demonstrate their failure, and man's triumph through love. On the other hand, even keen Wagnerites have detected revivalist intentions of a more sinister kind in the Sacred Festival Drama, *Parsifal*, in which they unearth symptoms of the incendiary principle of "purity of blood".

Wagner drew heavily upon myth and archaic legend for the libretti which he himself wrote for his music-dramas, because he held that:

> "In Myth, there almost vanishes the conventional form of man's relations, merely explicable to abstract reason, to show instead the eternally intelligible, the purely human."

Unlike his contemporary, David Friedrich Strauss, who described his humanist theology as "an apparatus for causing miracles to evaporate in myth", Wagner respected the mythic element of the Gospels; myth being "true for all time, and its contents, however compressed . . . inexhaustible throughout the ages". The lengthy biblical scenario of Wagner's youth, *Jesus von Nazareth*, had certainly demysticised its revolutionary hero, endowing him with the post-Enlightenment rhetoric of Feuerbach and Proudhon. The modern manipulation of myth seemed to Wagner quite legitimate in the service of "truth". And, unexpectedly, he regarded the Redeemer's supernatural genealogy to be as irrelevant "as Mozart having been born in Salzburg". The "purity of blood" by which Jesus came to be viewed as "the son of David" was an archaic metaphor as appropriate to statutary descent or even kinship by adoption as to the pseudo-science of Gobineau.

BEING, in Claude Lévi-Strauss's terms, the originator of structuralist mythology, Wagner was not ignorant of this flexible usage. "Blood", throughout the ages, had been a spurious substance put to use in ceremonials, sacrifices, and treaties. The "*Blutbrüderschaft*" of Siegfried's rollicking drinking-song in *Götterdämmerung* is a fair demonstration of its Wagnerian validity, binding the drugged hero in temporary alliance with his enemies until his memory is restored by further magic. If the mythic usage of "blood" as a sacred substance entered into the Grail-Legend of *Parsifal*, it was not in connection with race but associated with an archaic component of Christianity—one put to lucrative use in the Middle Ages: the magical function of the sacred relic.

The grail, from being a component of pre-Christian regalia necessary for regenerative kingship (without which natural circumstances such as the return of Spring would cease), had typically been added to the sacred-relic industry and given the (binary, structuralist) properties of a chalice for wine from the Last Supper, and a chalice for blood from the

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spear-thrust at the crucifixion. In Wagner's *Parsifal,* it exists also in unpleasant conjunction with an unhealing wound resulting from Royal sexual indulgence. This can be healed only by the agency of a pure (i.e., virginal) knight, in this instance the "*reine Tor*", Parsifal. There is no reason why Parsifal should also be "racially pure". Indeed, in Wagner's version of the story, he is the son of Hertzeleide, who is the sister of Kundry, the only character in any Wagnerian music-drama with the remotest suspicion of Jewish origin. However, this bond is of no interest to Wagner except as a reason for Kundry's inside knowledge of the hero's childhood. Where "purity" clearly obsesses Wagner—much to the annoyance and mystification of admirers of *Tristan und Iseult*—is in connection with sexual "sin".

QUITE POSSIBLY it is the incomprehensibility of Wagner's latter-day preoccupation with "sin" that has shoved Wagnerites into disbelief in this interpretation of "purity" and a preference for the machismatic partisanship favoured by 20th-century "Knights of the Grail". None the less, if they take the trouble to read the libretto of *Parsifal*, or investigate the documents surrounding its composition, they will find themselves in an atmosphere of claustrophobic Victoriana, in which two powerful influences predominate: Wagner's guilt-ridden wife Cosima, and his homosexual Royal patron, King Ludwig of Bavaria.

Together, these two held Richard Wagner in a thraldom during the years of his fame from which he escaped only momentarily—chiefly, within the periods of composition which compensated for his imprisonment, by sensuous excitement; until, as Virginia Woolf commented, music had reached a place not previously visited by sound. The dour self-flagellation of the Grail community of Wagner's Monsalvat is tolerable to Wagnerites only because it is offered as a vehicle for musical ecstasy. Paradoxically, the intervening seduction scene involving the "*fleurs du mal*"—the flower-maidens carrying the "*Zauberplage*", diseased enchantment—was quaintly presented in waltz-time. The heroine Kundry, symbol of eternal life and eternal shame, is an unwilling puppet in the hands of a self-castrate. It is the strange duty of Parsifal not simply to revivify the knights but to dispose of all local female talent so that the drama eventually triumphs through the establishment of an all-male cast.

AS IN ALL Wagner's mythic dramas, major elements of the traditional legends are retained and form a curious compound with his inventions. It is as if their autonomy enforced a degree of recognition which Wagner was unable to repress despite apparent contradiction. This certainly fulfils Lévi-Strauss's standards of structuralist mythology, and seems to have provided surprised delight for the composer. Often during composition he would rush into his wife's room to inform her of the unaccountable behaviour of his creations, which he was no more able to explain than his future audiences. Parsifal himself, being derived from contrasting sources, was full of such eccentricities. He was the randy lad of the *Mabinogion* whom the disillusioned seer Gournemanz dispatches to continue his gander's search for a goose. But he is also a "divine idiot" in the manner of St Basil of Moscow, and had roused hopes that he might be the awaited "innocent fool enlightened by compassion" who was to redeem the corrupted community and, in a wider sense, heal the world-wound.

This was rather more than the Arthurian legend had implied, and as the drama continues, it acquired also the pagan universality of vegetative regeneration in unaccountable conjunction with the Christian myth. The chastened knight Parsifal, condemned to errancy by Kundry for refusing her plea for redemption, returns to Monsalvat to find nature already beginning the process of regeneration because of her repentance. Kundry, whose sin was to have laughed at divine suffering, has learned to weep; and in consequence the meadows bloomed. Simultaneously (since we are once more with structuralist myth) all creation was being revived through the yearly *Karfreitag*—the magic of Good Friday, the day of the Crucifixion (or the holy day of the goddess Freia). Now Parsifal's sacred office became the (far from Christian) "redemption of the redeemer". His duties, upon coronation as the new Grail King, were: first, to redeem Kundry from the curse of immortality (in accordance with the Buddhist principles which had become crucial to Wagner's last years); and next, to reunite the archaic regalia necessary for regenerative kingship, by bringing together the (inevitably sexual) symbols of spear and grail, and thereby healing the mystic wound. This spiritual victory is confirmed by the Christian paraclete, the Dove (formerly the symbol of Venus), which descends upon the ritual of structuralist salvation while the sublime chorus informs us in Wagner's incomparable harmony that "the redeemer is redeemed".

FROM THE DAYS OF Mark Twain's visit to Bayreuth, when he found the devotees more devout than in any Cathedral, to the present Wagnerphobic age, this astounding symbolist purée has held audiences spellbound as in the presence of major cathartic ritual. By Christian standards it is totally heretical, and to my knowledge has only once been performed in a church (appropriately, in the county of Durham). Its thematic obscurity together with its musical complexity have denied it the popular appeal necessary for a new faith. Perhaps only the composer's wife assumed this apotheosis awaited it; the Right-wing sects who have claimed *Parsifal* as a legitimating myth do so only by omitting large portions of its text. And although it complies with Wagner's vague specification as a music-drama for use at sacred festivities, it resembles more than anything else a dream-sequence. Syberberg's film version treated it as intimate personal fantasy —but only by performing radical surgery upon the plot. Its power lies not in the personal but in the universal.

Applying the barest analysis, the theme of *Parsifal* is "woundedness", symbolically relevant to each of Wagner's *dramatis personae.* In each case he demonstrates the spiritual sickness of guilt, experienced as shame. In the first

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act, man has betrayed his divine trust as ruler. Kingship is sick; just as in his earlier drama the gods experienced twilight. In the second act, guilt is transferred to the bond of love. Here even innocence is guilty because it has not learned compassion. Through insensitivity, the youth has killed his mother and the woman has lightheartedly collaborated with murderers. But innocence in terms of asexuality is no answer: we are shown another kingly archetype who has chosen self-mutilation, but this priestly celibate is guilty through self-interest. Like the "sinner-king" of the previous act, the woman demands the sanctuary of human love, but she is rejected by the "pure fool" who still lacks empathy. The hero kills the priest-king who has chosen the wrong path, and condemns the woman as contaminating—or guilty by association. Even though devoured by her own shame, she is able to see this as folly. Parsifal is cursed to wander in a wasteland where only woman knows the path.

The message so far is plain enough. Kingship is damned by irresponsibility, priesthood by power-seeking, innocence by stupidity. But the third act carries Wagner beyond human woundedness. The historic sacrifice of the Crucifixion has become no more than the symbol of human guilt. God is dead. If the world-wound is to be healed, a redeemer is needed by the Redeemer himself. Here, in the manner of all the major religions, Wagner suggests the impossible: contrition at the level of immolation—and, in this instance, demanded from womankind.

Whether Richard Wagner understood the message of his dream-sequence is questionable. On the completion of *Parsifal* he abandoned Bayreuth to its fate and retired from composition, but he constantly stressed that he was working on an essay which would explain the human role of "the womanly". His attempt to produce this enlightening tract was sabotaged by his wife, who seems to have chosen the occasion to throw a tantrum so devastating that it brought about his terminal heart-attack. It was a musical tantrum, in the form of Schubert's setting of Goethe's "In praise of tears", played by Liszt's terrible daughter. One is tempted to suggest that Kundry had taken her revenge.

But who was Kundry? Wagner himself had written, years before Freud, that "all art is the art of dream-interpretation". By this standard, Kundry would represent the eternally self-immolating feminine aspect of Wagner's own psyche, already amply demonstrated by Brunnhilde and Isolde. Viewed from the religious standpoint, we have also Wagner's earlier declaration that "woman, suffering, self-immolating woman, is in the end the true saviour", a mystery which may have been acceptable in antiquity but has long faded from recognition. Perhaps the divine role of sacred offering for ritual execution, usually attributed to the Jewish People, was felt by Wagner to belong rather to the "*ewig weiblische*".

WOMAN AS SYMBOL, executrix and victim of man's "shame" has been handled horrifically by the modern mythologist Salman Rushdie, in his novel of that title, without rousing any of the furor of his later work. It is probable that this notion is digestible at subconscious level, easily censored out by rational consideration. However, with Rushdie as with Wagner (both "religious virtuosi", to use Weber's term), the issue is most likely not womankind as such, but the more complex notion of the female element operating within man which is the threat—a constant provocation lingering outside the consciousness, to which there is no final solution.

It has been suggested with regard to the sexual content of Wagner's composition that its impact was conveyed subliminally in order to protect him from conventional 19th-century litigation. The subliminal message of *Parsifal*, being metaphysical, is less easy to tie down. Although clothed in acceptable compassion ("*Mitleid*"), in "redemption", and the cheerful "*Karfreitagzauber*", the symbolism of Kundry indicates a deeply nihilistic renunciation of life. If the moral of *Parsifal* is that the world-wound can be healed only by a Schopenhauerian "breaking of the world-will", this might explain Wagnerphobia more accurately than the commonplace indictment. It is an issue involving civilisation, and not merely an individual musical genius.

Notre-Dame de Paris

Morning breaks through the siege of night
And Caesar's *Parisii* erupt, stumble about,
Fall into Metro entrances, drunkenly shout—
Quote Camus, Sartre—finally take flight.

de Sully's buttresses press and gently caress
Our Lady's thin walls and spreading glass,
Ignore hordes of tourists that naively pass
Beneath the dancing nave and ancient dress.

In the mist the façade has become the bow,
The buttresses—lost oars of a Viking ship
That entered the Seine on a plundering trip,
But now bears an amused Virgin in its prow.

Frank Manley

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POINTS OF THE COMPASS

Picture-Postcard from Lindos

Under the Aegean Sun

By Melvin J. Lasky

"Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

Ecclesiastes (11:7)

Is Lindos—which was the ancient capital of the island Rhodes, with its two natural harbours attracting trade and travellers for thousands of years—one of those "enchanted" places, that "island in the sun" which has captured the human imagination since time immemorial?

Poets and adventurers, moved by an apparently eternal romanticism, have never ceased searching the seas for a "place of felicity". It is, after all, the real essence of what Sir Thomas More ascribed to *utopia* ("nowhere")—for it was also, in More's pun, *eutopie*, the island of true happiness and order. Homer's Odysseus sailed to his fabled Ithaca, and Sappho searched for love (and found death, far from Lesbos) on a Leucadian isle. Not that the quest was all literary, although Apollonius of Rhodes was a bookish kind of expatriate, much like the Lawrence Durrell *de nos jours*. He was an Alexandrian—and later was to be the director of the great classical library in Ptolemy's Alexandria—but became a citizen of Rhodes and an honoured teacher in its school of rhetoric. Presumably his motive for expatriating himself was bitter disappointment at home at the non-recognition of his tale of the Argonauts as being in the Homeric tradition. Only "abroad" did he find an audience of grateful readers of Jason's voyage in quest of the Golden Fleece.

Did, in any of this, the sun play the seductive role which lures millions of modern tourists to find their own "Fortunate Isle"? We know from scholarly historians of European tourism that it was an English lord, Brougham by name, who came out of his foggy and rainy and cold Anglo-Saxon island to "discover" France's Mediterranean Riviera: it was he who made fashionable the eccentricity of idling away hours on a golden beach in the torrid sunshine. This was only a hundred years ago. Still, over the millennia the sun was not an insignificant factor in the minds and motives of mankind on the Mediterranean shores.

As a matter of fact Lindos was, in the legendary beginnings, supposed to be a grandson of the Sun God Helios. (The famous "Colossus of Rhodes" was a bronze monument to Helios made by a certain Chares of Lindos in 302 B.C..) A dramatic ode of Pindar is the source for this classical legend; and it was once inscribed in letters of gold on a block in Lindos's temple of Athena whose ruins still stand on the Acropolis between the bay of Lindos and the cove of St Paul's.

> *Ancient stories tell us*
> *that when Zeus and the gods*
> *were allotting the world,*
> *Rhodes was not yet visible on the ocean surface.*
> *It lay hidden,*
> *an island in the briny depths . . . .*

But Helios himself reported that he

> *had seen*
> *within the gray depths*
> *growing from the sea's floor,*
> *an island that would be rich in nurture for men*
> *and kindly to their flocks . . . .*

Thus it was Zeus's compensation to Helios who, through no fault of his own (he just happened to be absent), had received no proper portion in the "allotment of the world". Now he was to come into his own:

> *. . . once Rhodes*
> *had broken through*
> *to bright air,*
> *it would be his prize.*

In turn his three grandsons came into their own, founding Rhodes's great cities of antiquity: Lindos, Ialysos, and Camiros (which, on the west coast, still constitutes one of the spectacular ruins of the island).

Yet no island is an island unto itself—Rhodes is one of the so-called "Twelve Islands" (*dodeka nisos*). And what of the others, baked in the same sun, and in the case of Patmos the presumable scene (or, at least, the vision thereof) of St John's furious apocalypse? They lie in the Eastern Mediterranean between the shores of Turkey and Cyprus, and many of the unnumbered ones are merely uninhabited rocks and reefs. I am told that the Greeks speak of the islands as God's castaway stones, "for when He had finished making the world the pieces left over were thrown into the Aegean Sea . . . ."

Still, even the stony remnants became part of the divine design. And it was almost as if there were some heavenly arrangement between Zeus and Jehovah. For the Greek god intended that his intentions be not quite fully disclosed—"Zeus himself", said a seer, "intends a prophet's revelations to be incomplete . . . ." Some parts of Heaven's design were yet to come. Later pieties would recognise the holy function of Patmos where the doom-laden verses of John's revelation were to be chiselled into the stone of a hill-face.

And even Lindos's St Paul's Bay constituted one of the stations on the way of what has been called by one theolo-

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gian "the earthly journey and the divine quest . . . ." Saul, a Jew who became Paul on the road to Damascus, was an indefatigable Christian proseletiser; it was on his third missionary voyage that he landed at Lindos, at the smaller of its classically natural harbours. He was coming from another Dodecanese island, Kos (famous as the birthplace of Hippocrates, "the father of medicine"). He was to go on to Jerusalem. There he was arrested by the Roman governor, and imprisoned in Caesarea for some two years (57-59 A.D.).

The landing on Rhodes is mentioned in the Biblical book of *Apostles* (21.1). Earlier journeys had taken Paul from Antioch to Cyprus, Corinth, and Athens; his fourth was the last mission of martyrdom which traditionally includes his death in 67 A.D. in one of Nero's Roman prisons.

THE TRACES OF gods and prophets persist in these islands, although not every traveller to these ancient places from European Christendom, nowadays rather closer to sun-tan oil than holy oil, senses the shadow of the past. In the 18th century there was still a lingering awareness of the divinity in every stone and scene, and a famous French doctor could write in one of his "Letters from Greece" (1788):

> "How admirable, how magnificent is this scene! What a sublime idea does it give of Him who said *'Let there be light, and there was light!'* Night has thrown her dark veil over this glorious picture, yet the eye remains still fixed on the heavens, and the soul still feels deeply penetrated with sentiments of admiration and gratitude. How great are the works of the Creator! and how feeble the conceptions of man!"

Two hundred years later, if the crowds of tourists were still infatuated with the light of the day and the nightly firmament, there was a notable return among the poets and men of letters to more ancient attractions. Lawrence Durrell—who has written a handful of international best-sellers about the Greek islands and the Mediterranean shores, and who thought it was his "destiny and duty" to spend years of his life in the Aegean—has emerged as what can be called the patron-saint of paganism, and is perhaps more in touch with the modern traveller's spirit.

> ". . . It is an extraordinary place, the temple of Lindos; so light and aerial, so pure and in tune with the sky above. One longs to know what statues stood up here. It is far more impressive than Sunion or Erix in Sicily. Here one regrets the intrusion of Byzantines and knights—everything sweaty-Christian should be scraped off, so that the pagan soul of the place can float free, a reminder of the time when the aspirations of the human mind acknowledged the powers and terrors of nature. The site echoes with its past like a chord of music which only the mind can only hear." *The Greek Islands* (1978)

But whether early or late, pagan or pious or sheer escapist for a fleeting moment in time, the response was unfailingly lyrical. Even the hardy travellers like Lady Hester Stanhope, in the days before roads and runways, make a prose-poem of their adventures: ". . . starving 30 hours on a bare rock, even without fresh water, being half-naked and drenched with wet, having traversed an almost trackless country, over dreadful rocks and mountains, partly on foot and partly on a mule for eight hours, laid me up at a village for a few days: but I have since crossed the island on an ass, going for six hours a day . . ." (December 1811).

Lamartine, the celebrated French poet, had a rather more sentimental experience (although the "destiny" he referred to was for him to become President of France):

> "Heaven seems to have formed this island . . . . We set sail on a splendid afternoon. I have my eyes turned upon it as it sinks at last into the sea. I regret this beautiful island as an apparition one wishes to recall; I could have settled there, if it were less separated from the moving world in which destiny and duty compel us to live! . . ."

That "moving world" has become in our time a compulsive holiday-making adventure, a duty for millions to take their turn and tour in their own crowded but carefree "island in the sun", no longer the private apparitions for English aristocrats and French poet-politicians, nor even the archaeological puzzles for German and Italian diggers. The grand traceable outline of the Lindos amphitheatre lies bare, barren, and ignored, among the white-washed villas and Arabo-Turque captains' houses that have been turned into bars and discothèques.

Pleasure is the contemporary watchword; and if that be a pagan heresy, make the most of it. To "have fun" and to "enjoy" are the new universal aspirations, quite free from Durrell's old "powers and terrors of nature". Didn't Zeus have, among his lesser but happy deities, formidable gods for laughter, drink, and merriment? Has, then, the "undisclosed prophecy" been fulfilled?

OUR LAST recorded traveller to Lindos was the fun-loving American satirist, S. J. Perelman (a famed wit of *The New Yorker*), in his book *Eastward Ha!* He had troubles with his sunburn. He was incensed when the village tailor made him a pair of trousers without pockets. Yet he wrote:

> ". . . The charms of that hamlet having been extolled since the pre-Christian era in every guide-book, travel folder, and home movie, there is no need for this troubadour to gild the lily, but it must be admitted that Lindos is addictive. Visitors yearn to get back to the steep huddle of white-washed dwellings nestled below its acropolis; in wintry northern climes they squirrel away their savings so that they may loll again on its shelving beach encircled by jagged hills and improbable blue water. Some visitors never leave, as witness the small permanent colony of artists and writers; others—notably flaxen-haired English and Scandinavian beauties—are drawn back annually by lust for the bronzed donkey-boys who escort trippers aloft to the temple . . . ."

And there, up on the Acropolis with its ruined Doric columns under the burning sun and in Pindar's "piercing light", Helios still reigns.

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THEATRE

The play's the thing...

By Malcolm Rutherford

IT WAS SAID of Laurence Olivier that he could read out a page from the London telephone directory and make it sound moving. And the compliment cannot have been deserved only by him. It could apply to a large number of British actors and actresses, past and present. For it is a peculiar fact that the British are very good at acting. Along with spy stories, spies, and middle distance running, acting is an area where Britain excels. The only other field that I can think of in which the country far outstrips the rest of the world is pharmaceuticals. Many of the world's leading drug companies—ICI, Wellcome, Glaxo, for example—are British.

Nor is the talent for acting confined to professionals. Give even the most unlikely person a chance, and it is possible that he or she will emerge as a competent mimic, perhaps with a song and dance act to go with it. Jeremy Thorpe, the former politician, was one of the best mimics of his time. Margaret Thatcher wanted to be an actress when she was at school. Recently she has learned to deliver a joke in a way that even Tommy Cooper would have admired—as we saw from her speech to the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool in October: low marks for content, top marks for style. In the House of Commons, the Labour MP Dennis Skinner seeks to hide his intelligence and behave like a stand-up comic, which is why he can be so effective.

If I knew the reasons for this British penchant for acting, I would explain them here. Maybe it has something to do with the language. English is a good language to act in. But Britain is not the only country that speaks it. One does not automatically associate good acting with (say) English-speaking Canadians. Possibly it is tradition. If there has been a long history of good parts—starting with Bottom or Hamlet, both of whom had fun with the play within the play—perhaps that generates people who want to play them well. Is it because the British are not basically serious? Or, conversely, that acting a part is the British form of seriousness?

But none of these reasons is entirely convincing. It is no more easy to explain why the British are good at acting than it is to disentangle why they perform better in pharmaceuticals than in other science-based industries.

The question that these reflections preface is whether the performances are not frequently—*too* frequently—superior to the play. Several London productions in the last few months have suggested that the answer to the question is overwhelmingly "yes".

Take, for instance, *Single Spies* by Alan Bennett, which enjoyed a longish run in Shaftesbury Avenue. It was a double bill. The first and shorter part was about the British spy, Guy Burgess, based on a real-life incident with a British actress in Moscow. It was made for, and first shown on, television. That in itself is an interesting sign of the times: screen first. Still, it worked pretty well on stage, having most of the ingredients the British are most famed for: good acting, spies and jokes, with a touch of sentimentality. If one wanted to be slightly unkind, one could say that it was Cambridge all the way: from the Footlights to the *KGB*, via Jermyn Street, all with a social conscience.

The bigger part of the programme was *A Question of Attribution*, a play about another spy, Sir Anthony Blunt, and the Queen, whose pictures Blunt looked after. The Queen was played by Prunella Scales, for whose performance almost no praise could be too high. She looked like the Queen, talked like the Queen, walked like the Queen, sat down like the Queen, and carried her handbag like the Queen. She also had some marvellous lines. Queen Juliana was telling her about her Vermeers—"Well, one has a Vermeer, so one was quite interested." But, apart from all that, there was not much of a play. What we had was an actress playing the reigning Queen on stage for the first time, and playing her not unsympathetically: a few in-jokes perhaps, but hardly satire. The most interesting character might have been Blunt, but he was not developed. *A Question of Attribution* was largely a vehicle for the acting prowess of Ms Scales.

TWO OTHER recent productions illustrate the point more strongly: namely that the performance is more powerful than the content. One is *Napoleon: The American Story*, which has had a run at the Phoenix. The other is *Boswell for the Defence*, which had a limited run at the Playhouse (incidentally one of London's most attractive theatres and now back in business).

Both are literally one man shows (Prunella Scales at least had a supporting cast), and both are based on the oddest of material. Napoleon is played, almost from the cradle to the grave, by John Sessions, who has played Hamlet in his time and is forever on our television screens. There is no doubt whatever about Sessions's abilities, and the performance is a huge success. Yet it is based on some pretty zany material. True, Sessions gets through the life of Napoleon just about chronologically. But it is not really a play about Napoleon the man. It is about every allusion that has ever been made to Napoleon on stage, screen or radio, with a great many extraneous references thrown in. Almost any outrageous pun you can think of is there. When Napoleon arrives in

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France from Corsica, having trouble with the language, he is "hoist by his own patois". When he is dying in St Helena, he sits down to dictate "Nap's last tape".

Napoleon, in short, is an extended theatrical in-joke. Sessions pulls it off. He is a superb mimic, whether he is doing George Bush or the characters from *Gone With The Wind*. There is a splendid take-off of a philosophical German military man: "Maybe we should follow Hegel and only attack the *idea* of Napoleon." All that is done by Sessions with breathtaking changes of speed. Yet it still seems slightly odd that he should be doing it at all. It is a performance, not a play. And because of its length it cannot be counted as cabaret. It has no targets to hit.

Boswell for the Defence is even odder. Certainly it is more a play about the life of Boswell, the man who wrote the life of Dr Johnson, than *Napoleon* is a play about Napoleon. Although it concentrates on one particular case—Boswell's defence of a convict called Mary Broad—a lot spills over not only about the man, but also about the social, economic and ethical climate of London and Scotland in the late 18th century. Britain then was not the prettiest place.

Boswell is played by Leo McKern, an actor of great stature. He had Iago under his belt long ago. He ought to play King Lear. Currently, he is best known for his television role as Horace Rumpole in John Mortimer's *Rumpole of the Bailey*. It would be hard to fault the performance he gives as Boswell who was, like Rumpole, a lawyer. It would be easier to fault the play. The first act is inordinately long: Boswell rambling about sex, drink and age, with the occasional reference to Sam Johnson and his friends. I was tempted to leave at the interval.

But the second and final act is riveting. Boswell recounts how he pleaded the case for the release of Mary Broad in front of the Lord Chancellor, an old school friend who now disclaims him. He thinks he has lost; in the end he discovers that he has won, and dances a little jig. It is everything that a virtuoso performance should be: jokes and pathos, an audience hanging on every movement, every pause, every word.

When it is over, however, one is left wondering how such a piece came to be written. Could it conceivably work without an actor as good as McKern to play Boswell? And why did not even McKern realise that the first act should have been cut almost in half? Is it because plays have to be a certain length to satisfy the theatre-going conventions?

I find all those questions puzzling. Not least, why is it necessary to delve into the past to find such odd characters as Boswell and Napoleon? And what is this nostalgia—for that is what it is—for Blunt and Burgess? The performances are stunning; the plays are peripheral.

Olivier said of himself that he took bad parts in bad movies because he liked the money. That was in the years when television was still underdeveloped. He preferred the stage. We should be grateful, I suppose, that some of our best actors still come back to it. But you might ask yourself when you last saw a play in the West End where the text outshone the acting.

The Dream

Some years ago I had a recurring dream
that I had lost you. I would go running
with outstretched arms through a maze of alleys
frantically begging you not to leave me.

Suddenly we would reach a familiar square,
where soon a vast, excited crowd would come
swirling around us, sweeping you away
in a delirious sea of upraised hands.

For a moment I would see you reaching out
to me, screaming my name, imploring me
to save you, then slowly you disappeared
beneath the chanting, surging multitude.

Invariably I would wake up sweating,
clawing my way past snarling, evil faces,
fearing that I had lost you for ever,
that you had somehow gone beyond recall.

Then with breathless relief I would find you
sleeping there beside me, as you are now,
unaware of my subconscious anguish,
lovely, serene and quietly breathing.

Raymond Tong

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LETTERS

Computerised Sonnets

NOW THAT WE have seen the bard at work on his word processor on page 58 of your April number, I should like to suggest a new variant of Sir Dennis Bray's rearrangement of the sonnets by means of rhyme links (*Shakespeare's Sonnet Sequence*, Richards Press, 1938): namely, that the chip ran away with the old block. Scholars seem so very sceptical compared to scientists, whose intelligences may easily be gulled, for instance, by black holes—which then appear. May I suggest therefore that a computer be enlisted to give us the odds of Bray's order being due, or not due, to chance?

GEOFFREY ROBINSON

Devon

Free Speech

M ("Column", ENCOUNTER, May 1989) likes the idea of "a Committee for Free Speech". As it happens, there is already a Free Speech Movement, which prefers deeds to words and concentrates on reproducing serious literary material which has been banned by law or by mob. Thus it has circulated thousands of copies of James Kirkup's poem "The Love That Dares To Speak Its Name", which was at the centre of the *Gay News* blasphemy case twelve years ago, to anyone who sends a stamped addressed envelope; and it would do the same with the offending passages in Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* if that were banned. As *M* says, "On this issue there can be no compromise".

M adds that "all blasphemy laws. . . should be repealed". As it happens, again, there is also a Committee Against Blasphemy Law, which has recently issued a Statement Against Blasphemy Law signed by more than 200 well-known people.

Meanwhile, I attended the Muslim demonstration in London on 27 May which called, in particular, for *The Satanic Verses* to be banned and in general for the blasphemy law to be extended, and at which banners and slogans openly called for Salman Rushdie to be killed. When I silently displayed a banner reading FREE SPEECH FOR ALL! I was immediately attacked by a mob of fanatical young demonstrators. My banner was seized and destroyed, and I was knocked to the ground and kicked and punched until rescued by older and wiser demonstrators. Barbara Smoker of the National Secular Society received the same treatment for the same offence. As *M* says, "Here, secular freedom and religious fundamentalism are in absolute contradiction, and we should not equivocate at all".

NICOLAS WALTER

Rationalist Press Association
London

Hook's "Stanford"

A COUPLE of points on the late Sidney Hook's excellent "Letter from Stanford" in the September-October issue of ENCOUNTER.

"The refusal to orient a course in the humanities politically is itself to take a political position". In his refutation of this, Hook should have pointed out that there are, in the world, three possible positions, not two. To wit: the political; the a-political (which is arguably political, as many people say); and the anti-political. The last are those, in Wyndham Lewis's words, "who neither wish to dominate, nor be dominated"; and who think of their fellow mortals in terms of "being", not "use".

My second point is: those responsible for the ethnocentric, politically-orientated, inverted censorship now being applied by many institutions in the UK—especially Arts-funding bodies—should be sent a copy of Sidney Hook's article.

WILLIAM OXLEY

Brixham
South Devon

Doktor Dutschke

I AM GLAD that in your discussion of "The Ideas of '68" (M. J. Lasky's article, ENCOUNTER, November 1988) that so much sensitive attention, beyond the polemical exasperation, was given to the slighter but revealing elements of irony, paradox, and (on occasion) grotesque humour.

Consider this detail in the life and death of Rudi Dutschke. Here was a gifted young man who was almost religiously wedded to the precepts of revolutionary dogma. He detected in Prague in 1968 a little bit of "bourgeois backsliding" and hit out at the reform movement. In West Berlin he was a ruthless *Revoluzzer*, and more than any single person was responsible for the ending of the traditional German University and its rites and customs. Young assistants became full professors. No one ever on any occasion wore black caps and gowns. Everybody *du'zt* each other, everybody wore blue jeans. Cleaning women were brought into the academic management committees, and for a while they had an equal vote with the fading *Ordinarius*. Dutschke's slogan put the old-style professor in permanent contempt: "*Unter den Talaren, der Muff von der tausend Jahren!*" (or, roughly, nothing but old rubbish under those academic gowns) . . . .

Well, the other day I chanced to be, on a private affair, in a nearby cemetery in Dahlem. Rudi Dutschke lies buried there, and I happened to pass his grave. On the headstone for this fiery young man who was the enemy and indeed the destroyer of all things in the traditional, stuffy and self-indulgent German Academy, I was taken aback to read:

RUDI DUTSCHKE
Dr. Phil.

Herr Doktor Dutschke! Did he request it as a "last honour"? Could it have been his family who thought that this represented, in the end, his final achievement?

In the Teutonic Valhalla, all the German gods have at least one academic title; and in a rare forgiving moment they must have welcomed Dr Dutschke as one of their own.

MATTHIAS LÖWE

Berlin-Dahlem

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Strange Lives

WALTER LAQUEUR, in his article on General Skoblin ("The Strange Lives of Nikolai Skoblin", ENCOUNTER, March 1989), continues the effort by old acquaintances and relations of Max Eitingon to remove suspicion that he served the *NKVD*. He does not succeed in doing so. The case is simple. Eitingon frequently passed money to a member of a Soviet intelligence and terrorist group, later convicted as such in a French court. There may be an innocent explanation, but obviously it raises *prima facie* suspicion. This is reinforced when we learn that Eitingon's money came from the family fur firm, still engaged in large-scale trade with the USSR: such operations were regularly used to transfer or launder *NKVD* money.

That Max Eitingon's namesake, Leonid (Naum Isaakovich) Eitingon, was a prominent *NKVD* Foreign Department operative working in Western Europe is no more than suggestive. But it won't do to say, as Laqueur does, that they were only cousins in the sense that "all mankind is somehow related". It is an extremely rare name.

Laqueur is of course right that proof is lacking. As he himself notes it often is in these obscure matters. But, to put it mildly, reasonable grounds for suspicion remain. Nor is the plea of "noble character" any defence. It was put for Hiss, Blunt and others. And Stalinist spies in the 1930s often had "the highest motives".

ROBERT CONQUEST

Stanford
California

I WOULD LIKE to congratulate Robert Conquest: NEVA is publishing *The Great Terror* in Russian and excerpts from *Harvest of Sorrow* will appear in *Voprosy Istorii*. It is a well-deserved recognition of the important work he has done over the years. However, even great men commit mistakes, as Lord Randolph Churchill once noted, and Eitingon is a case in point. In the murky context of espionage, once suspicion has been cast it cannot be removed to everyone's satisfaction, *semper aliquid haeret*; I fear I shall not persuade Conquest that he has been mistaken. Perhaps there will be further revelations under *glasnost* which will resolve this issue once and for all to his satisfaction.

WALTER LAQUEUR

Washington, DC

AUTHORS

Val Warner is a freelance writer whose short stories have appeared in P.E.N.'s *New Fiction 11* (1988), *Edinburgh Review* and *Scrievins*. She has received a Gregory Award for poetry and has published four books, including translations from Corbière and a collection of poetry, *Before Lunch* (Carcanet, 1986).

Brian Moeran was appointed to the Chair of Japanese Studies at the University of London in 1986. An anthropologist by profession, he has written extensively on Japanese society and culture. His books include *Okubu Diary: Portrait of a Japanese Valley* (1985) and *Language and Popular Culture in Japan* (Manchester University Press, 1989).

D. J. Enright, Co-Editor of ENCOUNTER 1970-72, is a freelance writer and teacher. He has published many works of poetry, fiction and criticism including, most recently, *Alluring Problems: An Essay on Irony* (1988) and *Fields of Vision: Essays on Literature, Language and Television* (1988). He has also edited the *Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse* (1980), *The Oxford Book of Death* (1983) and *The Faber Book of Fevers and Frets* (1989). His *Collected Poems* were published by Oxford University Press in 1981 (n.e. 1987).

Hugh Thomas, who was created a Life Peer in 1981, was from 1966-76 Professor of History at the University of Reading. Since 1979 he has been Chairman of the Centre for Policy Studies. His publications include *The Spanish Civil War* (1961), *An Unfinished History of the World* (1979), *Madrid: A Traveller's Companion* (1988), and a novel, *Klara* (1988).

Roy Kerridge is the author of *Druid Madonna* (1983); his non-fiction work about West Indians in England, *Real Wicked Guy*, was followed by *Bizarre Britain: A Calendar of Eccentricity* (1984), and *The People of Britain* (Robert Hale, 1987). His latest book, *In the Deep South*, was published by Michael Joseph in February.

Michael Thorpe is Professor of English at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *By the Niger* (1969) and *Out of the Storm* (1984), and critical studies of Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Doris Lessing, V. S. Naipaul, and John Fowles.

Geoffrey Heptonstall, film critic of *Cambridge Style*, has written a number of BBC network radio programmes.

Mark Hutchinson, who lives in Paris, is the author of various books and pamphlets, including *A Pretender's Flag* (1986), *Eleven Miniatures from the Aegean* (1989), and *The Emperor has no Clothes* (1989). A small selection of his work features in *The Gregory Poems 1985-1986 Anthology* (Penguin, 1987).

Julius Gould was Professor of Sociology at Nottingham University until 1982; in 1983 he was appointed Director of Research at the Institute for Policy Research. He is also Chairman of the Social Affairs Unit. Among his writings are *The Attack on Higher Education* (1977) and *Jewish Identity* (1984).

Paul Hollander, who was born in Budapest and lived in Hungary under both the Nazi and the Communist régimes, is Professor of Sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; a Fellow of the Russian Research Center at Harvard; and author of *Political Pilgrims* (1981), *The Many Faces of Socialism* (1983), and *The Survival of the Adversary Culture* (Transaction Books, 1988).

I. S. Gillespie, whose doctoral thesis dealt with Wagner and the political manipulation of myth, is an Honorary Research Fellow of the University of Manchester and author of *Old Wives' Tales* (Routledge, 1970).

Melvin J. Lasky, Co-editor of ENCOUNTER since 1958, is the author of *Africa for Beginners* (1962), *Utopia and Revolution* (1976), and *On the Barricades and Off*, a collection of his ENCOUNTER essays (Transaction Books, 1988). His most recent article in ENCOUNTER was "Berlin Notebook" (April 1989), written while on sabbatical at the Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin.

Malcolm Rutherford is Assistant Editor of the *Financial Times*.

Robin Fox's article, "Anthropology's Auto-da-Fé" (ENCOUNTER, September-October), was published with the permission of Transaction Publishers.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
The Grange Press
Butts Road, Southwick, Sussex

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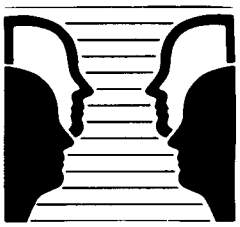
Life & Letters Today

Miami



SOCRATIC SPORTS: **The Super-Bowl game here between the Cincinnati Bengals and the San Françisco '49ers has led to some soul-searching in depth. As one of the football stars put it; "The personalities of the players that make up a team can make you or break you. It's as important as athletic talent. Some key people, personality-wise, are a kind of glue off the field that draws everyone together and cements your game effort. . . . One linebacker has a wit about him that's special. He doesn't come from the North or the South or East or West. He comes from each direction at the same time. . . . Another is a popular comedian and prankster who could make you laugh in a plane crash. . . .**

"Then there are the philosophers among the Bengals and the '49ers. If you were to ask one how to get across the street, he'd give you directions in terms of longitude, latitude, and degrees. He is like the second coming of Socrates. He can talk for an hour on one subject and say the same thing in 50 different ways. . . . Yet another is very similar. You have to think twice before you ask him, 'Tom, what do you think?' If you do ask, bring your lunch. . . ."

NEW YORK TIMES

Bonn

DANGEROUS WORDS: *In the planned national referendum for the spring of 1990 the Hungarians will be voting, in addition to the form of the new constitution, for a new name and national symbol for the reformed State. A deputy Minister of Justice arrived in Bonn to study the checks-and-balances of the now 40-year-old German Federal Republic, especially the organisation of its Supreme Court in Karlsruhe. "After all", he said, "we are both Hungarians and Europeans. . . ." And as such, presumably, there is no longer any need to emphasise "socialism" which will occur only in the preamble to the new constitution. And all related semantic combinations—like "socialist democracy" or "socialist legality"—will simply be dropped out of the national vocabulary; in fact, prohibited.*

DIE WELT

New York

DOUBLE STANDARD: **A recent editorial was an example of "The New York Times's" double standard toward undemocratic governments. General Augusto Pinochet is called a dictator. And so he is. But this pejorative term is applied almost exclusively to one type of tyrant: non-Communist Caucasian males who wear elaborate uniforms in public. Thus, Fidel Castro, Sese Seko Mobutu, U Ne Win, and the like, are spared the term.**

The editorial also states that dictators rarely allow themselves to be voted out of office. Yet, since the 1970s, military régimes have handed over power to democratic governments in countries including Argentina, Brazil, Greece, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, and soon, if all goes well, in Chile.

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

Naples

DEFINITIONS: **Beauty contests, wherever they take place, often reflect little that is attractive.**

The contest for "Miss Italy", held at Salsomaggiore Termi, near Naples, was no exception.

"Who is Leonardo da Vinci?" the jury asked one girl, in a rambling examination of general knowledge. "Uh . . . an airport?" she queried.

"Who was Stalin?" they asked another. "A Stalinist?" she suggested.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

Sydney

STICKS & STONES: *Scots donned sporrans and kilts in rival tartans for the biggest international gathering of Scottish clans in the Southern Hemisphere earlier this year [writes Christopher Morris]. The police anxiously guarded a pile of stones at the centre of a raging controversy. The 1,745 stones were collected from every parish in Scotland and transported 12,000 miles to the other side of the world to build a cairn, Scotland's bicentennial gift to Australia.*

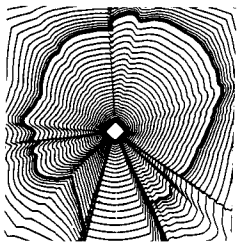
Down Under it has become known as The Great Cairn Caper—a saga of stones in which Celtic passions are running high in a Scottish soap opera and comedy rolled into one. The final resting place of the cairn, which commemorates great deeds and those responsible for them in the best Scottish traditions, has been the subject of a fiercely bitter wrangle. Four Australian country towns have laid claim to being the most Scottish place of all.

In the resulting war of words, no stone has been left unturned to win the dubious honour of providing a permanent home . . . One angry clansman has threatened to steal the completed cairn. And the "people's army" of Daylesford has warned in an open letter to the citizens of Sydney:

"Your border clubs will shrivel and die for lack of Daylesford's free-spending citizens. Your throats will parch for lack of our mineral water. Your Opera House looks ugly and we hope your bridge falls down."

THE TIMES

Paris



DESCARTES & SARTRE: *"The Commission des Opérations de Bourse" (COB), France's stock market regulatory authority, has delivered a stinging rebuke to the managers of mutual funds.*

M. Jean Fargé, the Commission's chairman, said that the investigation of share purchases in Société Générale was like a

". . . bathyscaphe, which climbs slowly to the surface, stopping for decompression on the way. It is surrounded by frogmen who do not have the same vision of this affair"

M. Fargé was also critical of the regulatory structure in which his own Commission functions, attacking the "absence of Cartesianism" in its organisation. Noting that the COB had undergone eight reforms in the 22 years of its existence, he described it as "a Sartrian organism, whose existence precedes its essence".

FINANCIAL TIMES

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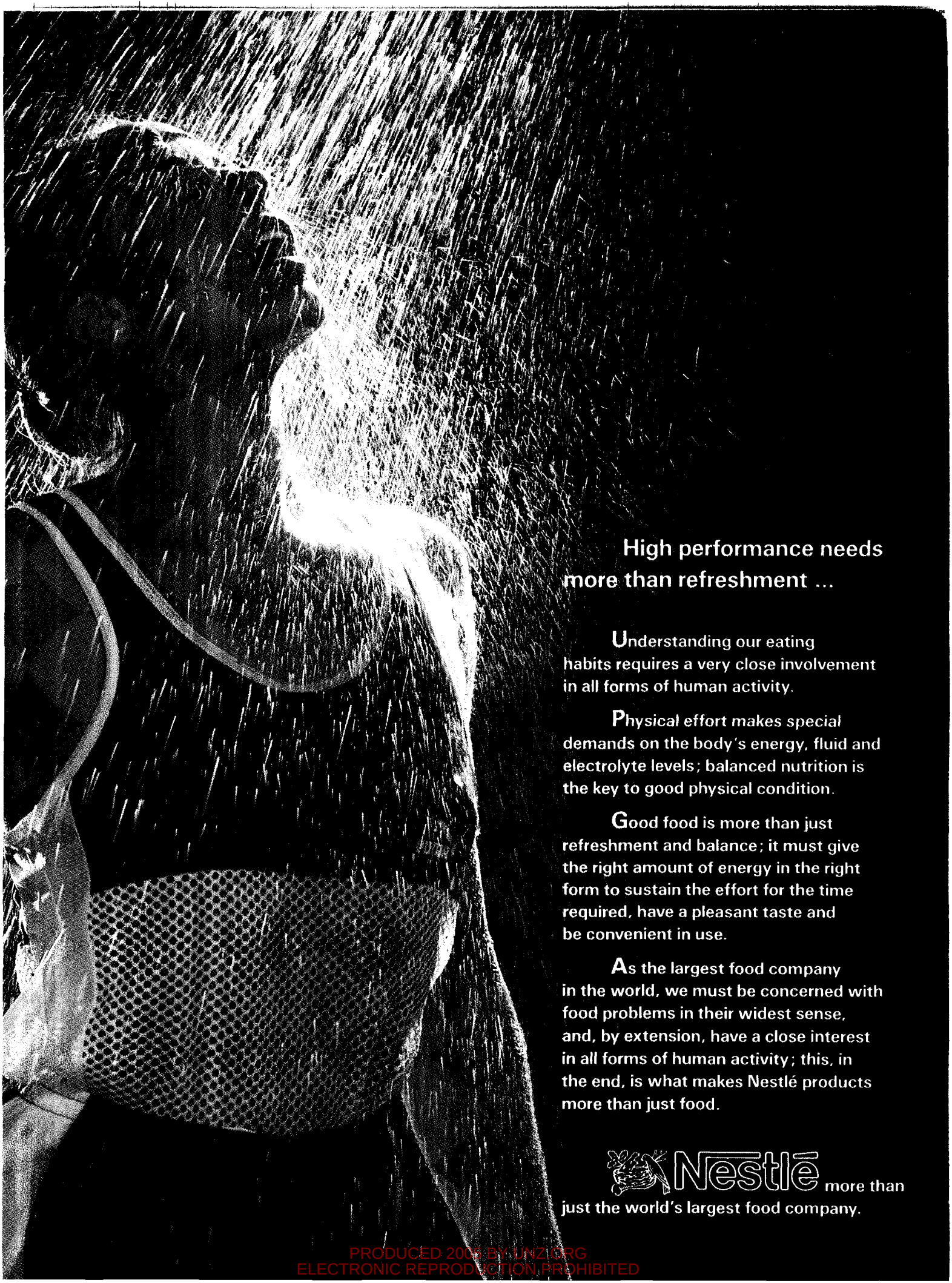

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LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

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As teller of tales

TALES FROM THE KINGDOM OF LAILONIA & THE KEY TO HEAVEN

Translated by Agnieszka Kolakowska and Salvator Attanasio

This volume offers readers a double treat. *Tales from the Kingdom of Lailonia*, translated into English for the first time, consists of thirteen charmingly satiric tales about people and events in a fictional country. All contain nuggets of philosophical wisdom relevant to our time. The tales in *The Key to Heaven*, which include one censored in Poland and never before published, are all taken from the Old Testament. Standing concepts of good and evil on their heads, the stories are provocative yet poker-faced and can easily be imagined as baffling a disapproving state censor. With 31 line drawings.

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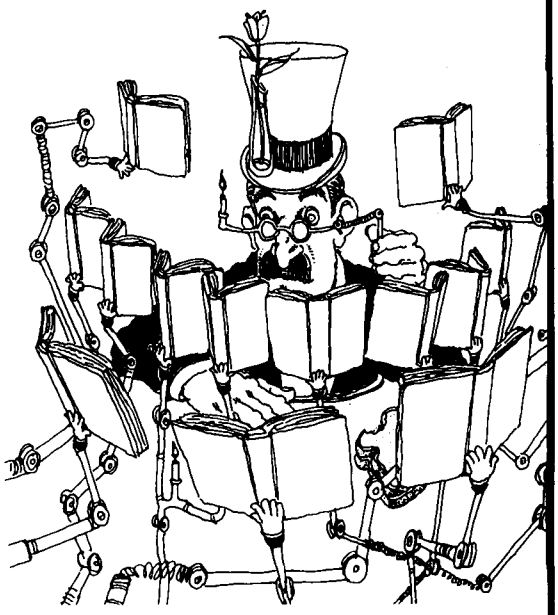

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